



**A JOURNEY INTO
CHRISTIAN
UNDERSTANDING**

**BOOK ONE OF THE
CHRISTIAN MISSION SERIES**

C. H. REN

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To Kelly

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INTRODUCTION

This manuscript is from a disciple of Jesus Christ, Son of the one true living God, to the people of this world (atheists, agnostics, people of all religions, people who believe in a single Almighty God, and Christians), in all humility and love. I hope that those who are sure that there is no God and those who are uncertain about the existence of God could find it in their hearts and minds to share this exploration of how one of your Christian brothers sees the world. To the people of all the religions of this world, it is with great hope that despite our differences we can recognize that we all share a desire to find the truth about existence and that even the so-called wisest men among us do not know the complete truth. Whether we agree with each other or not, maybe we can agree on the fact that an exchange of our different perceptions of God free from accusations and condemnations can enhance our separate quests for the meaning of existence. For, if our understanding of God is true, it will withstand any testing by opposing views.

To all the people who believe in a single Almighty God, the creator of the universe, please accept this as a message of friendship. What we have in common far outweighs our differences. All of us strive to understand the one true God so that we can better love and serve Him, and it disturbs us that other people's image of Him opposes our own. Yet, we so often fail to realize that the differences between us are not as great as the difference between us and those of our fellow man who do not believe in an Almighty God. Please let us not be clouded by our arrogance or fear of being wrong so that we are unwilling to learn about other people's understandings. In this light, please -accept this message as an attempt to share without accusations an understanding of God under Christianity. This is also an invitation for others to share their understanding, for the truth shall always remain the truth.

To fellow Christians this is an expression of love. There is no way to describe how fortunate I feel to be among you, sharing the gift of Christ our Lord. Please do not view the words in this book

as an attempt to further confuse and divide the Body of Christ. But accept this as a Christian responding to what his faith has called upon him to do. For in I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul taught us that every Christian must pour out what he feels God has given him and every Christian should be given his turn to share his understanding so that the Body of Christ can grow. Most certainly even the early stories of the apostles have shown us that with the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians still make mistakes and argue about who is right or wrong. Paul foresaw this and asked Christians not to argue over the understandings of our faith even though one may be clearer than another. Thus, I cannot proclaim my understanding as anything but what my faith has called upon me to see and hope that fellow Christians will share their similarities and differences in understanding. If some thoughts in this text reveal a new level of understanding, may it help unite all the Christian churches, Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants alike, in love, peace, and dedication. If some thoughts reveal a flawed vision due to human weakness, please pray that God will forgive and let them be a motivation for others to seek the truth.

Before we proceed on this journey, a quest for understanding, let us establish a reference point to base our discussions. Some may disagree with this reference point, but the purpose of this is not for argument but for achieving a commonality of understanding. Our reference point is the Holy Bible. In the Books of John, a Christian is anyone who proclaims Christ as one's Lord and recognizes that Christ is the Son of the Almighty God. The almighty living God is the creator of the universe. He controls and guides the course of all things in the universe from the beginning to the end of time. This one true God is the embodiment of all that is good, and He alone can be called truly good. This God is the God of the Hebrews as revealed in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Nearly 2,000 years ago the Spirit of Christ, which has been with God since the creation of the universe, came to us in human form, as Jesus, to give us a message of truth, the truth to salvation. Jesus underwent the death of the body so that God could bring the nations of this world to Him to call His own. On the third day after death Jesus rose to life to join God in Heaven with the promise that

He will return to fulfill God's plan for this world. God's plan for this world since its creation centers around bringing the spirit of man, created in His image, to Him to share in His love for eternity. The salvation of the spirit is the heart of Christianity.

The truth that Jesus brought is contained in the New Testament and planted in the hearts and souls of men and women by the Holy Spirit of God as they accept Jesus. Because God guides all things, the Bible must be considered more than just a human record of the events regarding God. It is the message that God has decided to be passed down to generations upon generations using human servants. Therefore, while the words in the Bible may at times reflect human limitations in comprehending the meaning of God, they are what is acceptable by God who would not permit false words to be passed down to those who belong to Him. The most important words of the Bible are those of Jesus as recorded by His disciples. Within those words there are no limitations but the secrets to everything as the Gospel of John declares. The Bible is from God to man through the limitations of the human language, because the spirit of man is so weak and distant to God. The mission of Christians is to embrace the words of the Bible so that God can touch us and plant His goodness, His love, and His meaning in us. The challenge is that a strength of spirit is required to see and apply the truth in the Bible. So Christians must continuously return to the Bible as their spirits grow: this power of the human spirit to receive God is termed "faith." Our mind receives the Bible and our actions affirm our acceptance of the Bible. However, it is our spirit that embraces the Bible. The saddest fact is that spirits lost to evil have no strength to begin the growth. Evil is what opposes God's goodness. Since only God knows who will be ultimately lost and saved, we Christians must work earnestly in spreading the gospel.

The Bible is the foundation of all Christian teachings. Because of the spiritual strength required to fully receive it, Christians throughout the centuries have spoon-fed the basics to the weak and helped each other increase understanding through prayer, love, and the sharing of thoughts. In this manner, the body of Christianity grows. While the final acceptance or rejection of a Christian's teachings is based on faith, the threshold test is simple.

A teaching that conflicts with the Bible cannot be Christian teaching, as an action or inaction that conflicts with the Bible cannot be Christian behavior. The first step in being a Christian is to simply accept Christ as Lord, for no minion of Satan can make such a claim. Taking the step to becoming a Christian is to receive a gift of hope. The gift of salvation through God's grace is completed after the strengthening and testing of this earthly life. From all those who call upon Jesus, only true Christians will be saved, for salvation comes with following Jesus' teachings in mind, body, and spirit which prepares us for the gift of the Holy Spirit and empowers us to do God's will.

To all the non-Christians, the above discussion of the foundation of Christianity must be very hard to accept. For many of you, your Christian brothers and sisters, including this disciple, have failed you in our actions and words though we follow Jesus. Our weakness of faith, which manifests itself in arrogance and doubt, has prevented us from being ideal living Bibles for Christ. Do not reject Christianity because of our faults, for we are saved by God's grace, but read the Bible carefully with an open mind and open heart. Please accept this book as a friend's attempt to help you understand the Bible.

Ever since the gift of Jesus was delivered to our world, His apostles and disciples have dedicated themselves to the mission of spreading the truth which leads to salvation. To fulfill God's plan, many have sacrificed all that is of this world including their lives. The blossoming of Christianity is paid for with the blood of Jesus and selfless martyrs. What I offer is but a drop in the wave of the Christian mission. However, if this one drop with the permission of God can help one extra person cross the threshold into the light of God, then there can be no words to describe the joy in this disciple's heart.

Throughout thousands of Christian churches across the world today and in thousands of remote locations, an army of God's servants work daily to deliver the message of the Bible. Some have tried to appeal to one's emotions, trying to evoke fear in God's punishment, or to one's need for God's comfort and protection. Whether one responds to these appeals or not, please understand

their love. The purpose of this book is to appeal to the mind by endeavoring to explain the Bible on a new level of clarity so that the mind can fully digest the truth. This is perhaps the most difficult mission because man cannot digest the complete truth. If it were thrust in full clarity onto mankind, those who are good would instantly kneel before God and those who are evil would be condemned. So, it is perhaps fortunate that we can only digest enough truth now to help those who are yet not worthy to turn towards good so that upon judgment day they will not be washed away by the full truth of God. Yet as we will discuss, in the gospels Jesus revealed that He has told us everything. The lack of understanding lies strictly in our ability to receive. The mission to digest more and more of what Jesus has given us will be a blessing to some, and in great sadness, a curse to others. The more we succeed in presenting the whole truth, the more people we will help towards becoming worthy of being received by God. However, for those who reject our efforts, we might be placing them in greater jeopardy of facing God's condemnation. Fortunately, our mission is clear, and all successes and failures are by the will of God.

Many of the discussions in this book may resemble a scientific analysis. Indeed, this mission to appeal to the rational mind must be like science. Science proclaims that its aim is to search for the truth. Therefore when God's truth is revealed in its full glory, then science too must bow down and accept that its mission is fulfilled. The difference between science and religion today exists because complete understanding is obtained by neither side. Science relies upon the senses of the body and therefore its discoveries are limited to the elements of this temporary world. It collects data about worldly events and develops stories, theories, and hypotheses about how the world works. Yet, to accept any scientific theory is still a leap of faith. Somehow given the physical evidence, the stories that science tells are made believable to many. Our mission to appeal to the rational mind must be like science in building a story that is believable by many. The evidence that we have to work with may be more obscure and at times we may need to apply the evidence retrieved through science. However, the truth must be made more believable by its level of completeness and perfection.

Every general goes into battle knowing the worst situation. So, embarking on this Christian mission we must assume that we cannot always rely on the spiritual strength of the recipient to help when it comes to accepting our story of truth.

This book is divided into four chapters, starting with the teachings of Christ, who is Himself referred to as the Word. The Word according to the Bible is the heart of all God's plans since the point of creation. The Word is the embodiment of God's truth. While in this world God's truth must be reflected in actions as well as words. Therefore Chapter II of this book is devoted to discussing the actions of Jesus, the actions of His apostles, and the actions of those who rejected Him and His people. With the words and the actions, Chapter III seeks to understand the ways of God from the point of creation to the last day of judgment. Finally with our understanding of the gift of Christ, the last chapter discusses what we as Christians are called upon to do. All the discussions of this book are on the teachings of the Holy Bible which exists in many translations but share a commonality in meaning. Since it is the overall meaning that we are seeking instead of the correctness of single words, the number of direct quotes based on any specific translation has been kept at a minimum. Instead, reference numbers are periodically given to point out relevant sections of the Bible. All the references are then provided at the end of the book so as not to disturb the flow of reading. The references are only meant to address those who debate the discussions. I hope that the reader will turn to the Bible over and over again as a complete whole instead of just looking at key verses. This book after all is a limited attempt at touching the wonders in the Bible, and the purpose of this book is to entreat and invite everyone to seek the truth of Jesus Christ through spirit and the Bible.

CHAPTER I

THE TRUTH OF GOD

Jesus said that those who can embrace His teachings without the need to witness miracles are truly the fortunate ones (1) and happy are those who believe without seeing Him (2). This is because through His words the meaning of God's plan is revealed. Jesus told His disciples everything, thus elevating them from servants blindly obeying God's laws to God's friends, sharing and willingly participating in His plan, which centers around the salvation of man as God's children (3). Therefore, the first chapter of this book is dedicated to studying the teachings of Christ independent of His miracles and sacrifice.

Christ is the embodiment of God's truth, which came to us in three ways. In the first and most direct way He told us how to change ourselves thoroughly so that we can be received by God at the end of bodily life. Jesus told us in straight-forward words the ways to increase our faith. The basic truth is discussed in Section One. Then Jesus used parables to show the ways of God and the universe. This greater truth reflects the light of God, which is hidden to all those in darkness. However, those with sufficient faith will be able to see the meaning in these parables, which have been taught for centuries. Section Two further explores the secrets within the parables. The final way the truth came to us is through Christians everywhere as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to gain insight into the words of Christ. The greatest of these insights came to us through the letters of the original apostles and the Apostle Paul, for they worked in a time when Christianity was young, strong, and pure. There were few Christians in the decades after Christ ascended into Heaven. However, the Holy Spirit worked in full force in them. The apostles, above all of Jesus' disciples, were given a gift of understanding so that they could plant the Body of Christ in perfect soil. Section Three of this chapter is devoted to studying the insights of the apostles as relayed in the letters of the New Testament.

SECTION I.1:

THE EXPLICIT TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Jesus taught us that the way to make ourselves acceptable to God and thus worthy of His love and salvation is by doing two things: First, above all else, we must love God with all our spirit, mind, heart, and body (1). Second, we must love one another, every person in the world, as we love ourselves. The entire body of laws governing behavior in the Old Testament is to control our actions to help us achieve these two things (2). As it was foretold in the prophecies, with the coming of the Messiah, God will plant His laws into our hearts and make a New Covenant with man. What this means is that we will be given the gift of understanding the truth that will guide our spirit, mind, and actions (3). If man can immediately understand fully what these two goals imply, then all the rest of the Bible would not be necessary. However, to God's great sadness throughout history many have not only failed to understand but rejected these goals. The ways and timing of God are discussed in Chapter m. The rest of this section is devoted to Jesus' teachings on how to love.

The departing command of Jesus to His disciples is to preach the gospel to all mankind concerning repentance, changing of one's ways, and the forgiveness of sins (4). Whoever believes and is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will be saved. Whoever does not believe is already condemned. The baptism that Jesus spoke of is the act of being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. In order to receive the Holy Spirit, one must not only accept Jesus but also willingly obey His teachings. For, even Satan and all his minions know that Jesus is the Son of God (5). The human act of baptism with water is a public declaration that one belongs to Jesus, which is true only if one follows Jesus in mind, body, and spirit. To all those who declare publicly that they belong to Jesus, Jesus promised that He will one day stand beside them in front of God and declare that they belong to Him. Church baptism should occur when one has already been baptized

by the Holy Spirit. Church baptism could also empower the spirit to receive the Holy Spirit or start people on the path away from sin so that one day the Holy Spirit could enter.

As the gospels tell us, the way to Heaven lies in doing God's will (6). There is no guarantee in just calling for Jesus. This is because the purpose of Jesus' coming is to help man do God's will. There are no additional burdens placed upon us with the coming of Christ, instead we receive help in the form of truth. Therefore, Jesus said that those who reject Him can be forgiven but those who reject the Holy Spirit and thus God cannot be forgiven (7). However, rejecting Jesus after receiving the fullness of His teachings is to reject a higher understanding of doing God's will, and for that one will be judged (8). Because of this higher understanding, which increases our love for God and others from our hearts to our actions, God makes a New Covenant with us to free us from the Old Covenant of Laws made to the Hebrews, His first chosen people. As this section will show, the New Covenant, in many ways, is far more demanding than the Old in terms of actions. However, because of its direct power over our spirits, God may be more forgiving of our failure in actions. When the path to purifying our spirits is strictly through actions as in the Old Covenant, then those actions must approach perfection. However, the required actions cannot approach perfection unless one understands the truth. Therefore, Jesus taught us that faith rather than blind obedience of laws is needed to get into Heaven. However, the laws of the Old Covenant for the Jews will stand firm for the Jews until the last days of this world (9). The Commandments of God, which embody His will, must now be taught not just as laws but with meaning and purpose. Those who embrace the teachings of Jesus but cannot see the meaning in the Commandments will be the least in Heaven. Those who teach the Commandments will be great in Heaven (10).

To love God in spirit, mind, heart, and body means that we have a mission in each of the four areas of our being. The greatest mission is to purify our spirits, making it possible for God to enter us through the Holy Spirit. Once the spirit leaves the body, it can then be received by God to be fully purified. For, even the least in Heaven is greater than the greatest man on earth (11).

Woe to those spirits that are so tainted with evil that God must reject and cast them out of His presence. The other missions for the mind, heart, and body are then instruments for the purification of the spirit so that it can truly love God.

Loving God Through the Mind

To love God with the mind means to seek continuously to understand Him and His plans for us and the world. Because we are under the influence of the physical world, for some of us the mind must first be opened to receive the truth before the spirit can embrace God. For the purest among us, a touching of our spirits by God might wipe away the stubbornness of the mind that blocks our relationship with God. Either way, the mind must become an instrument to grow the spirit and a guide for the body and heart. To love God with the heart is to make God the center of our emotional love, and to love God with the body is to act in this world in accordance with God's will. Our actions must be expressions of love for God and for one another. However, we are warned that all actions and words which extend from the mind must be traceable back to the sincerity of the spirit. If one's spirit is tainted, then one's thoughts will be of bad motives, and no words nor acts could save him. One's words will be matched with the thoughts on the day of judgment (12).

In understanding the will of God we start with the realization that the ultimate aim of the spirit is not just to be in Heaven with the angels but be united with God as Jesus said, "Father, may they be in us, just as You are in me and I am in You" (13). This declaration to man, as far as we know, has never been made to the angels. It has been revealed that man is to be below the angels only for a short period while he is being prepared (14). In this time of preparation the love in our spirits for God invites Him to be within us and in such a way we will be within Him.

If we are to be within God, be one with God, then we also have to be one with each other, as Jesus said, "I pray that they may all be one" (15). This is why we must love others as we love ourselves. This is not just a love of words and actions but the deepest love of our hearts, minds, and spirits. In Heaven, the world of the spirits,

the physical boundaries that block our thoughts and feelings will be removed. Thus, spirits can join together in ways unimaginable by man. Others will be in us and know us as we know ourselves. Because loving each other is God's will, obeying it will also be a reflection of our love for God. Everything in God's world is interlocked and woven together in perfection. As we continue exploring the words of the Bible we will discover that God is flawless in planning and meticulous in details, with neither confusion nor contradictions.

The World for Man

The world is this way for the sake of purifying man and every man is the focus of God's attention. However, the Bible also tells that God has known since the beginning of creation which of our spirits have the raw quality for being saved, and God's plan is that none who can be saved are lost. So the names of those who are to be saved have long been recorded in the Book of Life (16). This does not mean that man does not have free will and cannot control his spirit. It just means that God is omniscient, and thus He knows how we would choose. Given this knowledge, He controls all things to steer us on the right path, each individual towards his or her destiny. He controls even the evil so that the good can be tested and made stronger through trials. Satan cannot act without God's permission (17). Because there is no way for the human mind to comprehend all the intricacies of God's plan we must never judge others. God leads people to their destinies in His own time. At the right moment He leads the right people to the light of Christ. Only God has the right to judge and that authority has been given to Jesus for the last days. Therefore, the role of a Christian is to teach, help, guide, and sometimes even scold, but never judge.

Within God's plan the people who are to be saved are given appropriate blessings. However, the only way to God is through Jesus, the embodiment of the truth. According to Matthew, "No one can know God except through what Jesus chooses to reveal" (18). Those spirits that did not have the opportunity to receive the full message of Christ will be educated after death (19). The good upon this education will be received by God and the evil will be

cast out (20). Only God has the right to decide who in this life has not received enough of the truth and deserves the second chance.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed to His disciples the people who are truly blessed by God because of their spiritual qualities. Based on the understanding of Matthew we can conclude that God is pleased by the following spiritual qualities in man. To begin, those who recognize that they are spiritually poor, they have seen their current status and opened the way to receiving the power of God. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who mourn for others, God will recognize the intensity of their love and comfort them. Those who approach God in all humility, they will receive what God has promised. They have recognized that everything is through God and no one has the right to be arrogant. Those who seek to do what God requires, God will not let their efforts be futile. They shall be satisfied fully. Those who show mercy to their fellow men, they have shown the strength of their love and God will show mercy toward them. Those who are pure in heart, they have fended off the evils in this world. Thus, they are fit to see God and His truth. Those who work for peace, they have seen and dedicated themselves to building the world that should be. God shall call these people His children. Finally, the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are persecuted in God's name. Their rewards shall be great in Heaven. These are the spiritual qualities that God seeks, and in His time He shall deliver what He has promised (21).

The disciple Luke detected in Jesus' sermon a tie between one's physical life and spiritual qualities. Therefore, he claimed that the poor should be happy for the Kingdom of God is theirs, if they choose to receive it. The rich should realize how terrible it is for them to be living the easy life while so many people are suffering and struggling to stay alive. Those who are hungry in this world, God promised, will never be hungry if they come to Him. On the last days of this world, all God's people will be invited to the feast, the triumphant wedding feast of the Lamb (22). All those who gorge themselves with the food of this world, their contentment is but temporary. Some day in the life eternal, they will realize the food of the Spirit they never had and go hungry. Those who weep now because of the events of this world, they have seen the ways of

this imperfect world. If they accept the Kingdom of God, there will be joy and laughter. On the other hand, those who laugh in spite of injustice and suffering, some day they will mourn and weep. Finally, all those who are rejected, hated, and insulted by people now because they follow the ways of Jesus, a great reward awaits them. Those who compromise their values and conscience to win the appeal of people now, they shall suffer the fate of false prophets.

Jesus' declaration about God's blessing is related to God's purpose for this world. We have said that this physical world of man is a creation of God for the purification of man. God controls the world to place the spirits that can be saved in positions where they can grow and offer even the spirits that cannot be saved their just chance. Sometimes, spirits grow because they are tempted and yet they turn to God; sometimes spirits grow because they suffer yet they embrace God; sometimes spirits grow when they are forced to obey others so that they acquire the humility to face God; and sometimes spirits grow when they learn to love and sacrifice so that they can advance to the greater love that is in Heaven. Every event in life plays perfectly together to bring the Kingdom of God closer. While not all the spirits can grow to the level of salvation, God's justice demands that all people get the chances that they deserve. This understanding is summarized when Jesus taught that whoever loves this life will lose it, for they have not seen the purpose of this life and the perfection of the Kingdom of God that is to come. Also, whoever hates his own life in this world will keep it for life eternal, for they too have not seen the beauty of the Kingdom of God (23). This world is a creation of God, and the beauty of God's plan for the perfect world that is to come is reflected everywhere in this world by every blade of grass, every flower, every bird in the sky. As Jesus said, these creations of God are far more beautiful than all the riches of man (24).

Upon understanding the purpose of this world, we must then use it as an instrument to purify our spirits. We must free ourselves from all the physical desires for money, pleasures, and power that chain us to this world and away from God. This is a world where Satan and his minions are allowed to wander freely to corrupt the hearts of men. Satan can plant evil thoughts even in the minds of

apostles, as Peter showed (25). By defeating the temptations of Satan, we become stronger to receive God. To help us, God has assigned guardian angels. The angels who look after children, as Jesus said, are very close to God (26). Jesus specifically emphasized our need to love and look after children, for their spirits enter this world uncorrupted and untested. As the child gains more awareness of this world, the Bible urges him to retain the innocence of childhood. We must cling to God as a child clings to parents and view this world through the eyes of a child (27). While children will become corrupted to different degrees at different ages, woe to those who lead a child away from God (28).

Knowing that the purpose of this world is an instrument of God to shape us, we must embrace God under all suffering and hardship. We must make the bond between us and God unbreakable. Our faith must be strong enough to ensure us that whatever happens to us is meant to grow our spirit. When we are not yet suffering, we should focus ourselves on the ways of Heaven and not worry about what may happen to us in this world. God cares so much about every one of us that even every strand of hair on our heads has been counted (29). The more we worry and tie ourselves to this world, the more God will have to test and strengthen us.

Knowing the purpose of this world, we must accept our appointed positions in life and use them to understand the ways of Heaven. This means that the slave should serve his master, the citizen should obey the state, the wife should obey her husband, and the child should honor his parents. This does not mean that these people are inferior, for in Heaven spirits are all sons of God. There are no parents except God, and there are no masters except God. In the world of the spirit we are all brothers. That is why Jesus posed the question who is His real mother when Mary arrived. This is why Jesus taught us not to oppose the state which is allowed to exist for us. By obeying laws, such as paying taxes, we train ourselves to follow the will of God and free ourselves from the world's temptations. By fighting against our positions, we show that our hearts are tied to this world. Therefore, our real ambition should only be working towards God's plan, for God provides what we need (30). Since the days of the gospel, people have challenged

one's ability to obey this teaching of obedience when such actions conflicted with Christian values. However, if we think closely, there is no conflict. Jesus revealed to us that the commandment is to love God, and not necessarily give God money and many sacrifices. If the money could be better used to honor one's parents, then both commandments can be obeyed. In more extreme situations when Christians feel that there are no alternatives, there are no alternatives because of the hold this world has on us. In the early days when Christians were faced with either renouncing their faith or being fed to lions, they did not rise up and attack the state. Instead, they chose death and in their sacrifice all God's truth shone. Not all people have the faith to leave everything to God's care. Fortunately, our salvation does not depend on our ability to follow Jesus' teaching to perfection, but on our spiritual growth linked to heart, mind, and body. Knowing that most of us, even His apostles, are weak in faith and must often confront the troubles of this world alone, Jesus told His apostles to carry money and swords after His ascension into Heaven (31). Yet, in facing the world we must never act out of anger nor hate.

Man in This World

Knowing the purpose of this world, we must embrace every situation in which we can learn about the strength of pure love, which is God's love. When a husband tries to love his wife the way God loves man, he realizes the endurance and tolerance of God's love. When a master tries lovingly to lead his servants as God leads man, he understands the awesome task God has undertaken. When we try to forgive the most trivial offenses committed against us, we see the greatness of God's forgiveness and mercy (32). When a parent holds his child, he feels a little bit of what God must feel when He greets man who turns to Him. Can a husband continuously work to bring his wife to him when she has rejected him, forgotten about him, and slept with others? Can a master work for the salvation of his servants even when they refuse to serve? Can any man forgive when others have tried to kill his son? Can any parent endure the hurt when his children do not even know him? God has done all these things and more.

In the previous two paragraphs we have alluded to some of the reasons for God's creation of man and woman and His intention for them to marry. The total purpose, however, extends far beyond what was said. First, woman was created from man, and children were created through them. Therefore all of humanity is truly of one body, the body of Adam, the first man. God gave men and women desires for each other so that they would produce children and allow new spirits to receive the gift of this world. However, without a commitment between men and women that extends far beyond the desires of the body, humanity will become slaves to lust. By keeping the vow of loyalty, the spirits of man and woman are made stronger. Also, as the marriage grows through the years, a deeper love might form that resembles more the great love that spirits should have towards one another. Jesus showed us that this vow of commitment is more of the heart than of actions. If one indulges in dreaming about breaking one's marriage vows or seduces others into such types of thought, then one is just as guilty of committing adultery as the act (33). In growing this body of humanity that stems from Adam the centerpiece is the children (34). For the sake of growing children in the light of God they should have parents whose love for one another resembles the deeper love of the spirit.

Jesus taught us that the ways of this world are not the ways of Heaven. Those of us who have been accepted by God will be beings of the spirit with perfect bodies that are without gender. Men and women of this world will all become sons of God (35). We will not marry, but the love of the spirit will be extended to all. Therefore, we must understand that the desires of the flesh are meant just for this world.

We have spoken of the dangers of hate and now we speak of the dangers of love. Spiritual love is the force that carries man into Heaven. However, love that is tied to this world enslaves us and pulls us away from Heaven. This love may emerge in the closest of human relationships as a part of spiritual love. To save the physical life of a child, a desperate parent might turn to any force that will help, even Satan. Yet, God's plan is for that of the spirit, not the body. To obtain the affections of a woman, a man can commit all forms of sin.

Yet, the physical love or lust of man and woman is only meant for this world. In an effort to relieve the sufferings of this world, a humanitarian might become angry at God because he does not understand. Each man must walk a very careful path, a path in which the love of the spirit for God and fellow man must always come first. Most certainly, spiritual love must never be sacrificed for those aspects of love that cloud our minds and tie us to this world.

Loving God Through the Spirit

The understanding and experiences that God grants us through the world open our spirits to a relationship with Him. The most critical piece of this understanding is the teachings of Jesus, which opens the door for the Holy Spirit to rush into us. With the Holy Spirit linking us to God, we can then begin to truly love Him. The first step in this love of the spirit is to cherish this relationship with the Lord. This is best done by opening our hearts to Him in prayer. Prayer is a conversation between man and God. Thus it is best done in private, free from the distractions of this world. In our prayers we should focus on things that pertain to the will of God. Things that pertain to our corruption in this world, such as need for wealth and vengeance, are best left unprayed for. We cannot expect God to receive prayers motivated by greed, anger, and other dark sides of man's nature. In Jesus' lesson on prayer, every important thing to God is simply yet perfectly expressed. The Lord's prayer praises God, expresses desire for the fulfillment of God's plan, asks for the food of the mind, spirit, and body, seeks forgiveness of sins, declares our love for fellow man, asks for protection from Satan, and pleads with God not to test us too hard (36). As it is shown, a prayer is not in the number of words but in the power and dedication of the spirit.

In our prayers we reach out to God. However, we must also recognize that God is reaching into us through the Holy Spirit. When we open our hearts to God, it must be complete and free from concealment. Why does man continuously hide his dark side to others and to God? In its hiding place the dark side ruled by Satan grows and consumes him. Does he think that God cannot

see or does not know the darkness? Christians are asked to confess their sins so that the dark side can be washed away. Since we are one, Christians should also confess their sins to each other and the strengths of others will help wash the dark side away.

Loving God Through Actions

While man is in this world, his spirit, mind, and body are interlocked. Thus, how can one claim to follow the ways of God if one's actions reject them? Our actions stem from the mind which is empowered by the spirit. To think about evil is the first step into darkness, to speak of evil is the second step into darkness, and to do evil is the third final step into darkness. In three steps, the evil in man is affirmed. Therefore in the teachings of Christ, men will be brought to trial for their initial steps into darkness. Before we act in anger, the hatred in our hearts toward others has already caused us to betray God's will for us to love one another. Therefore, everyone should make sure that all hatreds are resolved before entering into God's judgment (37). In our mission to love one another, it is clear that when a man, based on lust, forces himself upon a woman he betrays the purity of the spiritual love. If a man thinks about such acts, he has already betrayed in spirit that love. If God is in our thoughts then God must be in our words. Recognizing that only God has the power to make things happen, how then can anyone swear? Swearing, too, is a rejection of the truth.

To follow Jesus in action is indeed the most difficult challenge because the world corrupts us through the body. While the judgment of the darkness within us will extend from our actions to our spirits, the judgment of the good within us will extend from our spirits to our actions. Men will be judged by their deeds, for deeds confirm what is truly within us. To love God and one another, our deeds will have to be far greater than not committing acts of hate and betrayal. The love that comes from the spirit and touches the spirit must be made of far greater substance. Knowing that God guides all things, including the events of this world, we must love even our brothers and sisters who declare us their enemies. The love of the spirit is complete and unconditional. We must forgive all those who wronged us, and endure the physical and mental pain that had been rendered unto us.

Even in pain we must help our perpetrator not to sin anymore. The need for vengeance has no place in the Christian heart, for it is said that God makes the sun shine on good and bad people alike (38). While the desire for justice may be great, the only true justice is in what God does. Finally, we once again turn back to the complete mission of loving others as we love ourselves. If a Christian truly sees all the people as a part of his body, then does a body hoard the nutrient in one area and starve the rest? In the same way, can a Christian shower himself with luxuries while others are starving? If we understand the ways of God, then giving one's money to the poor sheds some of the hold of this world on us, affirms our love for our fellow man, and elevates the poor beyond basic needs so that they may for the first time learn about God. However, money is one of the strongest forces that bind us. Thus, Jesus said, "It is harder for the rich to enter into Heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" (39).

Upon receiving this greater understanding of God's will, what must we do? Jesus' directions are simple. We must follow Him and God for They are one. God wants us to be with Him to share the joys of Heaven. Therefore, happiness is in following God's will. God's desire for us to come is so great that these words are given: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; if you knock at the door of Heaven it will open" (40). The great sadness, however, is that many will knock at the wide gates of Hell and few will enter Heaven (41). Even among Christian leaders there will be those who come to Christ saying that they have worked in His name, but Christ will have to reject them because of the evilness in their intentions and the darkness in their spirits (42). They have never followed Jesus in spirit. We must remember that what Jesus asks under the New Covenant is not for us to be perfect, for that is not possible by man's action, but to cross the threshold of God's acceptance so that God can make us perfect. God is justice. So the more we are able to cross the threshold, the greater our rewards will be in Heaven. For all of us who follow Jesus in spirit, mind, and body, we shall be called His disciples, a direct extension of His body linked forever in spirit.

We are taught that the true embrace of the spirit must be followed by actions. We are also warned repeatedly that actions without faith and love of the spirit will condemn us, just as the Pharisees (43). Ultimately, we are not made acceptable to God through the perfection of our actions but by the growth of the spirit, which is often achieved by how we sincerely choose to act. An act of goodness stemming from the spirit strengthens the spirit. However, no man can achieve God's goodness and no man can reach Heaven based on his own actions. Yet, we can make ourselves acceptable so that we are received into Heaven through the grace of God. Jesus taught His disciples not to worry about reaching Heaven through their actions for what is impossible for man is possible for God (44).

Being a Disciple

The path of a disciple is, out of love for God and for our fellow man, to spread the good news of Jesus so that we can all become instruments of God's will. On this path we must always remember that we travel in a world given to Satan to test the spirits of men, separating good from evil. While Jesus was with the apostles, they lacked nothing. However, after Jesus left they were instructed to protect themselves in spirit, mind, and body with all the talents God had given them and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus even asked His people to carry swords. However, they were always for protection, never to be swung in anger, hate, greed, revenge, or judgment. The ways of disciples must be as shrewd as snakes and as gentle as lambs (45). The truth that Jesus brought to this world is a banner for conflict. In its light the good and evil shall separate in opposition. The spirit of each person is independent, free to embrace good or evil, and in so doing, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters may be divided (46). There can be no peace until the final days of this world when the good and evil are permanently and clearly separated in Heaven and in Hell. Until that day, the disciple's journey must never stop and he must never look back, not even for his dearest love. To look back is to forget the ways of God, and even love could become a trap in this world.

There still is no place to rest for Jesus and His people in this world (47).

The disciple must remind himself of God's promise that many shall come from the east and west to dine with Abraham and Isaac. To be an instrument of God is to be a bearer of this invitation. Jesus came for those who need Him the most, those who are far away from the light of God and those who are in desperate need of the light of God (48). Yet Christianity must not be spread by force. The apostles never used their power to make the people believe. They brought the Word to a town with a greeting from God. If the town rejected them, they simply left and took back the greeting. Then the town was left for God's judgment. Christians are God's messengers, not His judges. To those who have not accepted God, the message might be a simple one such as: However you enter into Heaven, it is far better than Hell (49). You must get in there at all cost. The way to Heaven is through the quality of your spirit. Thus, Jesus taught us that if any part of your body causes you to sin and taint the spirit, it is far better to lose that part of the body (50). However, no man is strong enough to completely free himself of sins. Therefore we need God's help in cleansing our spirits to a point where He can accept us. This help came to us as the truth of God, and this truth was embodied in one man whose spirit is God's first born Son. He is called Jesus!

The life of a disciple, a Christian, is not an easy one. God has said that those who are doing His work should be cared for by their brothers and sisters who are doing worldly work (51). It was declared that whoever welcomes a disciple welcomes Jesus and God, and whoever welcomes a good man shares in His rewards (52). However, this is a world that had rejected the most precious gift from God. It is a world that had taken God's beloved Son and crucified Him as a criminal. A disciple may want a great deal for his hard work, but he certainly deserves no more than what Christ our Lord had received. Thus, true support for a disciple's work is not the material contributions or adoration of men, but one's spiritual connection to God and Christ. Faith enables our spirits to reach out to God, and the Holy Spirit is God's way of reaching into us. This faith, when strong enough, stretches from the spirit to the mind in the

form of trust, and to the body in the form of dedication. Jesus told us that if our faith is but as big as a mustard seed we can command this world, moving mountains at our will (53). This is because God created this universe not with physical acts but with a thought and the Word.

The reward we can expect to receive is not public recognition or worldly success, but participation in the glory of God's plan. In our darkest moment, when it seems like everyone has rejected us and our physical bodies have failed us, we can take comfort in knowing that the Word is with us. The Word, Christ our Lord, in God's time shall lift us to His side, to His love, to His forgiveness, to His comfort, to His peace, and to His joy.

Disciples of Jesus are those whom God has chosen to do His work. Therefore, God often uses this world specifically to polish and purify His people. Jesus taught us that each Christian will have his cross which God has placed on him. A Christian should see the purpose of the cross and carry it willingly to follow Jesus (54). A Christian who is proud may have to bear the cross of periodic worldly failure. A Christian who cannot free himself of the desires for wealth may have wealth denied to him. A Christian may even have to face the departure of a loved one so that he can place his trust in God and the perfect world that is to come. The cross for Christians comes in different shapes and sizes.

Though the world is at times ruled by darkness, we Christians must not forget that we are one in Christ. Far more than any material thing one Christian can give to another Christian is spiritual love. Christ promised that whenever two disciples come together in prayer, He shall be there, and that whenever two disciples pray for something, God will answer. This is because while a single Christian may be too weak in faith, the union of Christians creates a power of the spirit that is far greater than the collection of individuals. Union, we within each other, Jesus within God, and God within us, is what everything is all about. Also, the power of even two Christians praying together shows us that the weakest of us is a step away from touching Jesus, and that all we need is the boost of a fellow Christian. Salvation is not beyond reach. Because of this tie between man and God, through faith and the Holy Spirit,

Jesus has given Christians authority often unrealized. Jesus told His disciples that what they permit on earth will also be permitted in Heaven. God's desire for us to receive His love is so great that once we accept Him in spirit, mind, and body, the rules in Heaven are for us to create (55). To go even further, Jesus told His disciples that the Kingdom of Heaven is in them. The perfect world that is to come will not be some creation of God for man to inhabit; it will instead emerge from our spirits, the spirits of His children. He will build the world for us and through us as He created the whole universe through Jesus and around Jesus.

While Christians should not judge others, they must nonetheless see the evil in men's hearts. This evil spawned by Satan can even attack the strongest of Christians. That is why Christians must aid each other to adhere to God's will. When a Christian sins, his friends should consult and guide him. When he refuses to heed advice, two Christians should be sent to help him cleanse his spirit. When he continues to ignore others' counsel, then he should be brought before the whole church. Finally, if he cannot see his sin, then he must be separated at that point from the Body of Christ. If he cannot follow the ways of God, then he is to be sent back to the world of the pagans with our prayers where God will decide his fate (56). In the world of the pagans, he will not be protected or sheltered by the love of fellow Christians. As Jesus emphasized, Christians are the light of this world and salt of this earth. However, when a Christian falls completely there is no hope for him, as there is no way for the salt to regain its saltiness. Yet, for as long as we are on this earth there is always the chance to change, for a Christian has not completely fallen unless he leaves this life with his broken faith. We may be temporarily defeated by sin with our faith dangling by a string deep in the back of our spirits. So even when lost in the world of the pagans, a defeated Christian may regain his faith again through the life God has planned for him. Alternatively, in the warmth of the church we might be careless and in our last moments of life be defeated by Satan. Our defenses against Satan must never end nor be weakened.

The teachings about fighting against the powers of Satan only pertain to those who refuse to turn away from sin. We are all weak

and can easily sin even after repenting. Therefore, as Christians we must continuously forgive others as long as they recognize their sins and turn to the Lord. Only the Lord has the right to judge which one of us can be saved (57). To those who are still in the world of the pagans, we must be even more forgiving, for they have not yet received the gift of Jesus. Knowing that the Lord forgives all past sins once a person receives Jesus, how can a Christian judge those who are still in the world of the pagans (58)?

The Body of Christ is vulnerable to Satan's external attacks, but what is more dangerous, those who have surrendered themselves to Satan have directly penetrated Christian organizations and now attack from within. Therefore, we must constantly be wary of false prophets. In the end the false prophets and all those who followed them will be cast into Hell, the prophets for whom they serve and their followers for not having enough power and purity to see God's light (59). The way to discern false prophets is to observe their actions. A true Christian must be one in spirit, mind, and body. Therefore, the words of the mind cannot be true if the actions of the body betray them. We must carefully determine whether these prophets produce the right fruit (60). A fruit that cannot sparkle in the light of the Word, the Bible, cannot be the right fruit.

As the world receives the disciples, people can only be either for or against Jesus. Anyone who denounces the Word, the truth of God, is against Jesus, for Jesus is the embodiment of truth. Jesus is the Word. Those who reject the Word are also against Jesus, for in their actions they have expressed what is in their hearts and led others to the ways of darkness. On the other hand, if one embraces the Word and follows the path of a disciple then he is for Jesus. Likewise, if one hears a portion of the truth, recognizes the possibilities, considers changing his ways, and endeavors to learn more about Christianity, then he too is for Jesus. However, he still has far to travel for his salvation. Jesus declared that even those who are not His disciples but work in His name are for Him, for whoever uses the name of Jesus cannot deny him. While they may not teach the truth, those who are strong in faith, upon hearing the name of Jesus, will begin searching for the true Word as the Body of Christ searches for them.

For those whom God has led to be disciples and given to the Body of Christ, Christianity, Jesus has given them the right to be children of God (61). This is so because they have been born of the Spirit. In order for a person to enter into the Kingdom of God, he must first be born into this world of the body through water and then be born into God's Kingdom through the awakening of the spirit (62). Upon this awakening, God baptizes him with the Holy Spirit. Since the awakening of the spirit is the only thing that matters in this transient world, at that juncture one's past sins are forgiven. Since the spirit is what we are trying to awaken, the purity that man should go after is that of the inside. If the inside is clean then the outside will become clean, for the outside reflects the inside (63).

To all those who join the Body, Jesus promised that the Kingdom of Heaven will one day come through them (64). However, that cannot be completed until the Word, the gift of God, has been spread across the world for all mankind. Before the final days, Jesus told us that there will be a time of awful horror, as described by Daniel. Those in Judea must run to the hills, and it will be a terrible time for God's chosen people. God has reduced this period so that some of His people will survive. Then, false messiahs and prophets will come to the world, working miracles and wonders to deceive even God's people. The sun will go dark and planets will fall from the sky as an indicator that the day of Jesus is near. On that day when Jesus returns to this world in full glory from the sky, His angels will be sent across the world to gather His people. Even among parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, some will be raised up to Jesus while others will be left behind. Until that day, Jesus promised that if we receive Him in this world, then our spirits shall be with Him and never die. However, to receive the life of the spirit, one must be willing to let go of the life of this body. For those spirits that receive Jesus in the World of the Dead, they shall live again.

As the last thought in this section, we address the question of how well do we know Jesus. Jesus came bearing the truth of God for our salvation. However, little is told about Him. The gospels tells us that Jesus intentionally kept His identity hidden to the Jews,

forbidding His disciples from revealing God's declaration that Jesus is His Son. He also commanded the demons not to reveal who He is. Therefore, while Jesus could have easily made the Jews see through miracles that He was their Messiah as foretold in the prophecies, He wanted the power of God's truth which He brought and embodied to be the source of their understanding and way to Him. This way the truth shall separate the good and evil. The days of Moses, God commanded all His people to worship Him, yet the evil in men's hearts hardened. What purpose would it serve for Jesus to come and command both the good and evil to recognize Him? The good and evil in man must be separated. Through Jesus some will see while others will go about their ways not knowing the power that has been given. Surely, if the evil people realized what the good are to receive, the battle to end the world would begin today.

For Christians, we know that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah of the Jews who is the King to replace David to reign for all times (65). In the Gospel of John, we were told that Jesus is the Word, the truth of God, and has been with God since the creation. In fact, God made all things through Him and He is the source of life (66). Perhaps this means that Jesus is the perfect spirit, the pattern God used to design the tree of humanity. Most certainly, the tree of humanity can only burst to everlasting spiritual life through the truth and salvation Jesus brings. Jesus has guided man throughout the centuries before His physical arrival. Yet, we are not told very much about His life in Heaven as well as the activities of the angels who serve God. Thus, while Jesus told us that the only way to know God is through Him; the only one who knows Jesus is God. For Christians, perhaps the greatest reward in Heaven is to finally know our Lord, our Savior, our Friend, our Companion. In knowing Jesus, we will finally be able to love Him completely and be with Him for eternity.

SECTION I.2:

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Jesus told us that He taught parables so that those who have the right spiritual qualities will be given more understanding of the truth of God, but those without the right spiritual qualities will be confused (1). While the parts of His teachings that are direct will lead us across the threshold of salvation, it is said that for those with more understanding, even more will be bestowed. In many ways, the parables are God's way of showing us that He wants us, His children, to understand everything. It is said that the truth of God is like a light that exposes the good and evil in man (2). Surely if the good and evil among humanity were totally exposed today, the world would quickly fraction apart and settle its accounts. The evil would confront the good, and many who would have turned to Christ, if given more time, would be lost. Therefore, the next level of truth that is beyond the basics of Christianity must be hidden in parables from the evil so that the good will grow a while longer and none who could be saved are lost.

With the substantial collection of parables, Jesus revealed to us the relationship between God and man, the Kingdom of Heaven that is awaiting man, the history of man that led to the coming of Jesus, the role of Christianity in God's plan, the ways of this world, and the end of this world. As one reads these parables carefully, one might discover multiple layers of meaning. This in itself represents the ways of God, for only the human mind is so linear in its thinking. The truth of God beyond the initial level that brings us into God's light is as deep and as wondrous as God Himself. The truth, the words of Christ, reveals God's grand design. Through this grand design of this and the next world, God Himself is revealed. In God's design, every event feeds perfectly into every other event in this world from the beginning to the end of time. Before planting the seed God knew how the tree of humanity would grow for thousands of years. He knew which fruits would come and He knew how to take care of the tree so that the maximum number of good fruits would

appear. Thus, all the good fruits were recorded in the Book of Life at the beginning of creation.

The Relationship Between God and Man

In revealing God's love for man, the parables showed us that the center of God's will is for the spirit of man to reach a level where God can accept it and purify it. If a man but crosses that threshold of repenting his sins under Jesus, all his past wrongs will be forgotten, and God will be happiest over his entry into Heaven (3). God knows that those sinners whom He forgave more will often love Him more (4). Ironically, a spirit lost in darkness that finds its way to God will often be stronger than those who have always received God's warmth. In its race to God, it may quickly speed past those who have been comfortable with their love towards God. Since God controls all things, some spirits far away from God are placed in their positions so that their faith can grow and go closer to God. However, many evil forces work against spirits lost in darkness. For other spirits, the darkness they are in serves to reveal the evil within them. Even though God knows who will come to Him, God told us that as a parent He will always respond to us if we are persistent (5). If anyone of us can be saved, God will ignore all the children around Him to find that lost sheep (6). This shows the depth of God's love. How sad it is that not all of us want to receive it.

It is said that we must also love one another after loving God. This world tests the strength of our capacity to love. In the end, Jesus will separate humanity as a shepherd would sheep from goats (7). On one side, He will place the righteous, those who have fed, clothed, welcomed, and helped the least of our fellow man. On the other side, He will place those' given to evil and destined to receive the fury of God. Because of them, this world is the way it is and must be destroyed in preparation for the Kingdom of God that is to come. Yet through them the good is made stronger, tempered like steel. In receiving our fellow man, always remember that if God can forgive our sins, which are great against the goodness of God, we must forgive the actions of those against us, which are considerably minor (8). This is made easier if we remind ourselves that

this world was made primarily for bringing our spirits closer to God, and all else do not matter. If the results of our spirits are what really count, then Jesus presents a simple question: If one son rejects his father's command but later sees his wisdom and obeys while the other son accepts his father's command but does not carry it out, which son truly belongs to the father? (9). To be God's children, we must follow His goodness in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. It is better to spend an entire life wandering to finally reach spiritual awakening than to stagnate at some comfortable level of self-righteousness, which is not acceptable to God. In our arrogance and self-righteousness, we should remind ourselves that we are but God's creation and as such have no right to be anything but an entity for Him to control. Yet, He gave us free will so that we can choose to serve Him. He gave us understanding so that we can be His friends. He gave us all His love so that we can call Him Father. If we choose to disobey Him, we are still under His control. If we choose to serve Him, then we should not expect rewards, for a servant is merely doing his duty (10). However, throughout history God has always rewarded His faithful servants, for the Master rewards out of love, not out of obligation.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of God is revealed to us through the parables on many levels -- for example, as a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds. However, this seed grows to become a huge tree in which all the birds make their nest. The first kind of mustard seed in building the Kingdom of God is the creation of man. Through that one man called Adam, all humanity was born. Humanity therefore stands as the heart of God's kingdom as one. Perhaps the angels in Heaven are then the birds that nest on this tree of humanity, for it is said that we are but for a short while below the angels (11). The second kind of mustard seed is the word of Christ. It was planted in a few disciples, and then it grew in strength across the world to make the Kingdom of God come true. The third kind of mustard seed is perhaps the faith in us. Once ignited through a spiritual birth, it can grow to bring us eventually to the side of God by His will. Our faith is where the Kingdom of God lives, and through it the rest of

the world will one day be rebuilt to be as perfect as in the times of Eden. Humanity is at one point compared to a fig tree, with God as the owner and Jesus as the gardener (12). The owner came to examine the tree every year for three years to see if it bore fruit, the formation of the Kingdom of God. Seeing no results, the owner wanted to cut the tree down but the gardener convinced him that fertilizer, or the truth, should be added to give the tree one more year to bear fruit. At the end of one more year, the period which we are in, the tree will either be cut down or accepted. Jesus has already revealed to us that this tree shall bear fruit and stand in the Kingdom. However, many dead branches will be pruned. In the Kingdom of God, there are perfect justice and rewards. Therefore, one should be careful not to take a position one does not deserve. The rightful person will come, and one will be without a position. The safest and most respectful way is, in all humility, to take the lowest position and let God elevate you to your rightful place (13).

The History and Coming of Jesus

The invitation to be the principal members of the Kingdom of God, as guests at the wedding banquet, was given a long time ago to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, through the years the Hebrews as a whole were too preoccupied with their worldly possessions and physical love to accept the invitation. Therefore, God's servants went out and brought back the poor, blind, and lame as the honored guests to fill the wedding banquet. They who have been rejected and tormented by this world shall gladly receive God's Kingdom. Then others in this world are invited to share the wedding banquet (14).

Since the invitation was first issued, the growing Kingdom of God was entrusted to the Hebrews as tenants of a vineyard. In the vineyard, God the owner prepared watchtowers, wine presses, and everything to make the grapes grow. However, through the years, when God sent His servants in the form of prophets to collect the fruits, they were beaten, stoned, and killed. Finally, the owner sent His Son thinking that they would surely receive Him. The wicked tenants, however, crucified the Son, our Lord Jesus. So, God killed those evil men and took the vineyard, the growing Kingdom of

God, and gave it to people, Christians, who will produce the proper fruit. The rest of the people of this world, who were once rejected by God as not having the right spiritual qualities, turned out to be the most important building blocks in the Kingdom of God. "The stone rejected by the Builder as worthless turned out to be the most important of all" (15).

While the poor and the lame who received the truth of God through Jesus are His honored guests, not all the others who come to the banquet, the Kingdom, will be accepted by God. Because many guests are not properly dressed, they will be thrown out into the darkness where they will cry and gnash their teeth (16). All those who have heard the word of Christ have received the invitation. If we choose to accept and become Christians, then we should become true Christians so that on the day of the banquet we will not be thrown out.

Role of Christianity

Christians, as new tenants caring for the growing Kingdom of God, have inherited an awesome responsibility. In the parables, Christianity is described as the lamp, the light for this world that must not be hidden. All Christians must show this light by their deeds so that people will praise the Father in Heaven. This light will uncover all that is concealed in the hearts of men and reveal all that is hidden in our understanding of this world (17). As a result, those who have the right qualities will be blessed by the light and those who are empty, devoid of the right spiritual qualities, will have their worthless treasures based on greed, lust, and selfishness taken away. Those who cannot follow the truth will not even have the lies to strengthen them. In the end, their own arrogance and hypocrisy will judge and condemn them.

Therefore, Christians must plant their faith on firm ground and dedicate themselves to the truth in spirit, mind, and body. The faith that is like a house on a solid rock will stand, and the faith that is like a house built on sand will crash terribly (18). God's testing of one's faith could be like storms hitting a house. Once the truth of Christ has been received, one must change one's ways. The laws and ways of the Old Testament are for a people who do not

have the complete truth, and thus most of them must live only as God's servants. With the Word comes a New Covenant from God to us, which calls for new ways of living and behaving. As the parables pointed out, one would not put new wine into an old wine skin, or get a piece of cloth from a new coat to patch the old (19). However, Jesus also said that the old wine is better. If we examine the Commandments of God, this is indeed true. If people can obey the Ten Commandments fully and completely, Jesus did not have to come. If people can reach the level of spiritual purity that such obedience is possible, then they will have made themselves acceptable to God. Jesus came because we cannot obey the Commandments. Humanity was not bearing fruit. Thus, Christianity is about forgiveness, a relaxation of God's laws, a lowering of standards for the living and all the dead who have not received the Word. Instead of demanding man to make himself fit for God, the New Covenant pushes the spirit of man past a threshold so that God can reach out and make us fit. Remember, Jesus said, "What is not possible for man is possible for God" (20).

In one of the most important parables, Jesus explained the effects of Christianity. The spread of Christianity is like sowing seeds. Those seeds that land on the path are eaten by birds; or those people who hear the truth without the ability to understand will be snatched up by Satan. Those seeds that land on rocky ground will be dried up after sprouting; or those people who receive the truth without spiritual strength will expire under persecution. Those seeds that land around thorn bushes will be choked when they grow; or those people who receive the truth without spiritual purity will be corrupted by the greed and worries of this world. Finally, those seeds that land on good soil will grow and multiply; or those people who receive the truth with all their spirit, mind, and body will spread the truth so that others will also be saved. Some will save a few while others many (21).

Christianity in many ways is like yeast, with the bushel of flour symbolizing humanity (22). With it, the flour rises, or the spirit of humanity grows to become the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Christianity is also described as a field which contains a great treasure, meaning God's love (23). Would one not sell everything to buy

that field? Alternatively, the truth, which is the gospel, is like a priceless pearl (24). Would one not sell everything for that pearl? However, before people accept this great gift and responsibility of being true Christians, they should make sure that their faith is strong enough to do the work, and that they are indeed the seeds on good soil. If one starts on a mission but does not finish it, others will laugh at him (25). This also applies to those who wish to oppose Christianity. They should consider whether they have the power to succeed, for Jesus always stands behind His own and God always stands behind Jesus.

The Ways of This World

The occurrences of this world have baffled even the very faithful. Why all this suffering? Why all this evil? Through the parables, we are told that until humanity has finished growing and is ready for harvest, the evil, which is described as weeds, must be left with the good, which is described as grain (26). This is because in pulling out weeds one might pull out some grain. God's plan for the world permits no grain to be lost. For example, if God never permitted Hitler to come to power, many physical lives would have been saved. Yet, many people who turned to God when confronted with such evil might have never found salvation. In many cases, even some of the worst criminals saw the truth and turned to God and away from evil. Still, others might ask why does God not simply create man to be good and perfect. The reason for this may be revealed through one parable in which the Kingdom of God is described as a field where the gardener plants, goes off about his own business, and soon the plants are ready for harvest (27). The world may be this way because God wants us to be like Him, free thinking beings. God can give us a spirit like His. God can give us free will as He has free will. However, the process in which the spirit bursts into life is something that must occur by itself. As a good gardener, God knows which seeds will grow, but the process of growing must still occur and thus this world exists. The world is the way it is because it is the best way to bring God's love to a vast Kingdom of His children. The angels have spiritual fabrics similar to that of God. However, the Bible never refers to them as God's children.

In another parable, it is said that this is a time when God is away from earth. This world is placed in the hands of men who are His servants. However, it is assured that the Master will return some day to reap His servants' efforts. Therefore, knowing what God expects, we must use all the gifts and talents that God has given us to do His work. Those who are given more must do more. For those with the same level of ability, the one who does more will be placed in charge of bigger things because God is just. Finally, for those who do not use their gifts, the gifts will be taken away from them (28). Also, those who reject God will be destroyed. In working and dealing with things in this world which has been given to Satan, a parable reminds us that non-Christians may be shrewder at the affairs of this world than Christians, and that Christians may be shrewder at dealing with the affairs of this world than the angels in Heaven (29). Therefore, we are better suited to decide how to use the affairs of this world to carry out the will of God. As an example, Jesus told the story of a dishonest servant who was wise enough to know that friendship is worth more than money and thus used money to buy friends. As people of this world, we must use our understanding of both the ways of this world and the heart of man to acquire what is truly important, the way to Heaven. For example, by learning to obey our earthly masters we can train our spirits to obey God. Jesus reminds us that in reality we have but one master, God. To follow the Master, we must leave behind all other masters of our spirits which manifest in the form of greed, fear, anger, and other worldly desires. By staying honest with the use of money, we can free ourselves of greed and learn obedience.

While we are managing this world for God, we must take care of our fellow man. If we hurt others, God will return by surprise to punish us. Since we know what God wants, our disobedience will be punished more harshly than those who do not know. This is only just (30). The parables emphasize how God wants us to love one another and fight against the forces of greed and arrogance. Through the story of the good Samaritan (31), Jesus showed us that loving one another means helping and taking care of anyone and everyone. A priest who praises God and does his duties, but ignores a stranger in

need, is against God's will. On the other hand, a Samaritan who does not know the teachings of God, but helps a stranger out of the nature of his spirit, is doing God's will. For Christians, we must remember that someone who has not received the Word but lives in spiritual love is far closer to God than Christians who study the Word but live without love. At the right time, God will bring those with love to the Word.

Jesus directly and through the parables spoke about the dangers of material wealth. He told us not to worry about our possessions, for God decides everything and real wealth lies in Heaven (32). He showed that the poor, like Lazarus who suffered, will go to Heaven to sit beside Abraham while the rich, who showered themselves with luxuries while ignoring the suffering around them, will end up in Hell (33). If they could not see the truth in the Bible while they lived, why should there be anything else that saves them after they are in Hell? There is no hope in Hell. The other great force that blocks us from God is our arrogance. In the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus showed that a Pharisee who thinks he is more capable of fulfilling God's will shall be humbled. Alternatively, a tax collector who knows that he has sinned and asks for pity will be made great. The tax collector has a better understanding of man's position and of his spiritual weakness (34). If one cannot see one's spiritual poverty, then God will not fill the spirit.

The End of This World

In accordance with God's plan, this world will eventually end. The pain and suffering cannot continue indefinitely. God is patient and meticulous in His work so that no one in the Book of Life will be lost. However, God will not procrastinate when the work is done. As the parables illustrate, in the end the angels will gather up the good and evil. The good will be with God while the evil will be thrown into the furnace of Hell where they will cry and gnash their teeth (35). It is important to see that the division is along good and evil, not along believing and non-believing. Christianity is meant to help the good and reveal the evil. Since God is the Creator, He has the right to do what He pleases. In one of the parables Jesus

revealed that the last will become first when the Kingdom of Heaven comes (36). Does this mean that the Christians will rise above the Hebrews, God's first chosen? Perhaps those Christians who preserve their faith through the terrible horrors of the last days will be elevated when Jesus returns to live with man. Also, those who receive the Word later in life, they often surpass those who grew up in the warmth of the church. As God's creations, we have no right to demand rewards for work done or to be jealous of others. Those who came first did so at the will of God; those who worked longer did so through the power of God; those who contributed more did so with gifts from God; and those who came later waited for the plan of God. No one but God knows when the events of this world will be completed. However, with the prophecies to guide us, there will be signs (37). For example, when the leaves appear on the tree branches, one knows that summer is near. Jesus assured us that this heaven and earth will pass while the Word shall live on into the Kingdom of God that is to come.

Before the last day of judgment, Jesus promises to return and dwell with us. As Christians, our utmost duty is to prepare the world for the Lord's return. We must grow the Kingdom of God and guard it diligently from all the thieves trying to break in. Jesus will come late, at a time when few are expecting Him. The alert servant will be there to open the door and receive His love (38). Through the parable of the ten bridesmaids, we learn that to be received by Jesus, we must keep a constant vigil. Our faith, likened to the oil in the bridesmaids' lamps, must burn until the moment of Jesus' return. Our attentiveness, like those of the bridesmaids' must be continuous, less we be asleep at the crucial moment. When Jesus comes, we must hold tightly to our faith because those who have lost theirs will try to take ours. Let them search for their faith and miss the moment (39). Nevertheless, we must love our fellow man, even those who have lost their faith. With love, we should help them regain their faith. However, our love for God and Jesus must be unwaivering. Therefore, at all cost and under any condition, we must never lose our faith.

SECTION I.3:

THE INSIGHTS OF THE APOSTLES

When Jesus started His work as a man, He selected twelve men to follow Him wherever He went as His apostles (1). He then addressed all the others who followed His teachings as His disciples (2). The apostles had the special mission of guiding Christians after Jesus returned to Heaven. The foundation of Christianity was left in their hands, and they suffered enormous persecutions, including the sacrifice of their lives (3). While Jesus was with them, the apostles were taught what they must do, which culminated in the surrendering of this life when the time came to attain life ever after. While Jesus was with them, the apostles and disciples all drew from the power of Jesus, and like Jesus they performed miracles.

The selection of the twelve apostles was not a random event. Instead, God had long ago selected the twelve people with the right spiritual quality for the work, and He influenced their lives so that they were at the right places at the right times. For as the Bible says, God paved the way for people to come to Jesus (4). Since the twelve apostles symbolized the twelve archangels who originally stood before God, one was destined to be lost to evil as Satan was lost to evil. The first three apostles, Peter, John, and James, were the closest to Jesus. God placed them as fishermen when Jesus found them to symbolize their true destiny as fishers of men (5). After recognizing their inadequacies, they, with Peter in front, followed Jesus without the slightest hesitation when they were called. Yet, even Peter's faith faltered when Jesus was being persecuted (6), but he returned to Jesus declaring his love (7). In Peter's hands, Jesus left the supreme responsibility of taking care of His people. Thus, Peter became the head of the first Christian Church (8). Of all the apostles, John was uniquely loved by Jesus in such a way that Jesus proclaimed, "If I want him to live forever, what of it" (9). Indeed, through John's writings of the Gospel and the Book of Revelation, a special

understanding of the Word and the vision of what is to come is revealed to us. John's vision of the future will be discussed in a later section along with other prophecies. Finally, to all the apostles who remained faithful to the end, Jesus promised that they shall one day sit on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel (10).

After His resurrection, Jesus stayed with His people for forty days and continued to teach them about what they must do (11). Then, He instructed them that after He returned to God they should wait for the Holy Spirit to enter them before beginning to build the Body of Christ. Thus, the Holy Spirit, as revealed to us by the writings of the apostles, is the heart of Christianity. Upon receiving the truth of God, those with the right spiritual qualities will be blessed with the Holy Spirit. This is the baptism that brings life and salvation (12). The baptism by water, as introduced by John the Baptist, is a declaration to turn away from sin (13). Today's baptism by water conducted in Christian churches is a further declaration that one belongs to Christ.

Once baptized by the Holy Spirit, one will be empowered with different gifts from God, each in conjunction with the work that he or she must do to serve God's will. The Holy Spirit in those early years of Christianity revealed itself to the disciples as tongues of fire descended onto both Jewish and Gentile believers (14). Some people, such as the disciple Stephen, were described as being filled with the Holy Spirit, suggesting that even for Christians the Holy Spirit may work within us to different degrees, depending on the strength of our faith (15). During these early years, a Jew devoted to God, but persecuted Christians out of ignorance, was selected by Jesus in Heaven to be His special apostle for spreading Christianity to the gentiles. The Apostle Paul, after temporarily being struck blind to make him see the truth, was instantly baptized by the Holy Spirit (16). Though often different from Peter in views, Paul's mission was affirmed by Peter. In a later letter, Peter discussed how Paul's teachings contain matters of great depth which may confuse and mislead the weak (17).

We must be careful in remembering that, while the Holy Spirit carries the power of God to us, it will not control us and completely transform us into new beings. The stories of the apostles

show us that even they, who were filled with the Holy Spirit, were still men with the capacity for making mistakes. Paul rebuked Peter for his treatment of gentiles who became Christians, and Paul and Barnabas parted ways after arguing over the work that should be done (18). The Holy Spirit, if we so permit, can work powerfully with our faith to guide us towards God's plan. Its power derives from God's infinite wisdom, not for individual glory but for the needs of humanity. When mankind needed to witness miracles, Christians were given the powers to heal, to drive out demons, and even to resurrect the dead. These powers were given to draw people to Christ, and not because people needed such actions. God, who controls all things, would not have made a man blind if He wanted him to see. Much more than miracles, mankind needed to hear the word of God. So, for some the Holy Spirit gave the talent of oration. As Paul said, a Christian should never be jealous of the gifts received by others. We all have our roles in growing the Body of Christ: apostles, prophets, missionaries, priests, and teachers (19). We each have a duty to use God's gifts to the fullest towards making the Kingdom of God come forth. The writings by the apostles are based on an extended understanding of the Word achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit.

While the Holy Spirit is given to all those who come to Christ, the Holy Spirit has been with us long before the departure of Jesus. Prior to the presentation of the truth of God to man, the Holy Spirit was only able to work in a very few people who were inherently pure enough to receive it. In the gospels, Mary and John the Baptist were said to be filled with the Holy Spirit (20). The physical form of Jesus in Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while Christians must cherish this most special gift of the Spirit, we must never assume that those who have not yet been led to Christ have not been touched by the Holy Spirit. Jesus described this gift as being so precious that it is better than Him being with us (21). When we study the actions of the apostles while they were with Jesus and later after being filled with the Holy Spirit, this is indeed true. While Jesus was with them, they drew power from Jesus to perform miracles, and Jesus guided their actions with words. With the Holy Spirit, they drew power from God, and the will of God came alive within them.

The apostles repeatedly instructed that, when we embrace Christ, we must turn away from sin. Since God is the only true good, sin is then any action or thought that is against God's plan and God's will. Such actions and thoughts are food for the Evil One. Paul spoke of how human nature is against God and how we must fight against the temptations of this world (22). Paul described sin as unnatural acts of the flesh for women and men, wickedness, evil, greed, vice, jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit, malice, gossip, speaking evil, hatefulness of God, insolence, pride, boastfulness, having no conscience, disobedience of parents, lies, and having no pity (23). In studying Paul's words we must recognize that all the apostles' teachings must work in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (24). With the power of the Holy Spirit, one can then understand what these forms of sin mean when applied to one's life. These words of Paul, in the hands of people weak in the power of the Holy Spirit, could become a dangerous weapon used to judge and condemn others. Christians who condemn others end up condemning themselves.

Paul's words are vague because they are not meant to be laws. The laws of Moses in the Old Testament taught us the specific actions that God dislikes. However, Paul's words are designed to elevate us beyond avoiding what God dislikes to doing what pleases God. Ultimately, God and Jesus are the only Ones with the right to judge, and They will judge not only our actions but also our secret thoughts. Therefore, as Christians we must always keep ourselves apart from those whom we understand through the Holy Spirit as having surrendered to evil, but avoid judging such people. Christians should simply move away from such people with no animosity if we feel that the purity of our spirits is threatened. However, before we move away, we must search within ourselves to determine that our understanding of what is sin is through the Holy Spirit and not through our arrogance or ignorance. We must always work towards people's repentance and quickly receive them into the Body of Christ once the Holy Spirit is ignited in them. While a Christian must always love, separation is at times necessary so that the love will not shield the evil within people from God's acts of purification. This is especially true for Christians

fallen to evil and separated from the community of Christians. They are left in the hands of God with the hope that God will control the events of their lives to lead them back into the light (25).

As discussed earlier, when we speak of those fallen to evil, we do not mean people who sin. All people sin and it is only through the grace of God that we are saved. Instead, we are referring to those who refuse to recognize their sins, dispute the specific words of the Bible, and exhibit no desire to stop sinning. If we measure everyone by God's laws, as described in the Old Testament, every man will fail. Thus, Paul proclaimed that the laws bring only death (26). The Holy Spirit, however, brings life because it frees us from the laws. Through faith and effort our spirits are guided to God even though our actions are far from perfect. Through God's grace our spirits are then accepted and purified. God's desire is for all of us to come to Him and come together within Him. The only way to achieve this is by love, love for God and love for one another. Love strengthens our faith and gives us hope (27). In the end, it is the purity of our spirits, as reflected by our thoughts, words, and actions, that determines whether we have crossed the threshold of God's acceptance.

The importance of purity led Paul to proclaim enigmatically that all things are pure to those who themselves are pure (28). Indeed, Paul has given us an interesting test for purity. Those truly pure cannot be tainted by any evil, sin, or temptations around them, for they will see everything as a design of God. They will use the darkness to push them closer to the light. They will use impurities to guide them towards purity. They will use temptations to strengthen their faith. Therefore, when we look at things around us as impure and grotesque, we may wish to ask whether the impurity is in us. Jesus proclaimed that blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. The pure may also see everything in this world to be within God's plan. As a controversial example, maybe what determines whether a picture of a nude human being is beautiful art or pornography is not the picture but the thoughts of the person viewing it. Can an object make a person sin? Can a situation make a person sin? A person sins by his free will because he receives the object or situation as a temptation. In Paul's example, if a person

believes that consuming select foods is against God's will, he will be sinning by eating them, even though Paul's greater faith told him that God permits us to eat everything except food offered to idols (29). The true nature of sin is not in the action but in the heart, for we should understand that all actions of this world occur with the permission of God. In fact, all the actions of this world are for one thing, to test whether our hearts will turn away from God and to strengthen our hearts as we triumph against such testing. As Christians, we must never intentionally lead others to sin if we know the things that will tempt them. However, what is more important is that we help others to increase their inner purity so that they will see no temptations. More often than not, the temptations we speak of come from the non-Christian world around us, the world that led the Apostle James to declare that to be this world's friend is to be God's enemy (30). Thus, we are forced to contemplate the issue of whether Christians have the right to impose what comes to us as help and guidance on non-Christians as laws. Some of Paul's discussions suggest that Christian standards are not binding for non-Christians. In the matter of divorce, for example, a Christian married to a non-Christian must never get a divorce, except under adultery. However, a non-Christian married to a Christian can get a divorce whenever he or she wishes (31). This is quite logical because the truth of God, as embodied in Christ, is not meaningful if reduced to mere laws.

Christians must never rebel against worldly authorities, but accept their persecutions (32). However, in a participatory government, should Christians instill their values into the secular laws through the framework of the government? There are no simple answers. Each Christian must decide case by case based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Remember, it is the salvation of people that counts in the end. By using laws to block certain temptations, we might be able to prevent Christians from falling in this world and create an environment for non-Christians to find Christ more easily. However, by blocking temptations in this world, we might deny Christians the opportunity to grow as their spirits triumph over desires. What is far more dangerous is that by forcing people to obey secular laws, we may cause them to lose sight of the fact

that it is really the will of God and God's desire for us to choose Him freely that matter. When people choose not to commit murder for fear of worldly punishments rather than for fear of betraying brotherly love, then their salvation could be lost. Thus, Paul declared that laws are for criminals, not for Christians (33). Perhaps secular laws should not be used in many cases to advance Christianity.

The apostles' teachings focus on one's transformation after accepting Jesus as one's personal savior. It is strongly emphasized that when you are chosen by God, you must respond with all your energy and heart. Not acting, according to the Apostle James, is a denial of one's faith (34). The use of God's gifts, according to Paul, is a duty, not a choice. Once selected, you are God's temple in spirit, mind, and body. The Kingdom of God will come through you (35). Thus, not only the spirit but the body itself must be kept pure. Purity is not necessarily in what you eat, for Jesus told us that food cannot make us unclean (36). Instead, the purity of the body lies in our thoughts and actions. Just as acting to serve God affirms our faith, acting against God pollutes us. When we act in such a way to damage our bodies, we intentionally reduce our capacity to serve God in this world that needs us. Thus, a Christian must maintain his physical health in order to serve God. Once under the banner of Christ, Christians must continuously oppose the forces of darkness as Paul instructed. The Word of God is the sword of a Christian and faith is his shield. He must wear truth as a tight belt and righteousness as his breastplate. Finally, the readiness to announce the Good News of peace must be worn as the shoes of a Christian (37). The gospels of Christ are presented to us in the form that God has permitted. They cannot be changed by man or the angels (38). The simple truth, as Paul pointed out, is that there is only one God, one Christ, one Holy Spirit, and one Church or one body in Christ (39). All Christians are one and must recognize that they are one, working together to advance the Kingdom of God. However, Christians are not perfect and all knowing in their understanding of the will of God. Therefore, they will inevitably have disagreements on how the Body of Christ should be advanced. Paul and Barnabas argued and parted ways. The thing to remember is that while there

is but one absolute truth in God, no Christian can see it completely and Christians who see it less clearly than others are still Christians. Paul personally expressed that he is glad that Christianity grows regardless of right or wrong motives. Indeed, those who receive the word of Christ may see it far more clearly than those who brought it, for the true word of Christ lives in the Holy Bible and we are all but messengers. We must block our arrogance from lulling us into thinking that we are anything but messengers. We cannot force people to believe, for that is by God's will. We can, however, help them receive the Bible by initially spoon-feeding them as Paul suggested (40). We can help them understand the Bible by sharing our limited understanding. In the same manner, Christians should not be discouraged when others refuse to accept our teachings, because the power and timing for others to come to Christ are not up to us. In pursuit of delivering the Word, Paul taught us to remain diligent and stay away from lazy Christians, for they might taint us (41). As we journey across this world given to Satan, we must be like children whose purity cannot be tainted by evil, but be mature in thinking (42). God's work is best done by those who apply all of their skills, their intellect, and their wisdom.

When we are weak in our work, we must accept God's punishment. God punishes us because we belong to Him (43). For those who belong to evil and live their easy lives, their punishment, which is everlasting, will come on the last day. In our weakest moment, we must remember that God is with us. For those of us who are poor, God has blessed us, for our reliance is entirely on Him. For those of us who are rich, James promised that our riches will one day be taken away (44). By doing so, God will save us. Often we are reminded that money enslaves in subtle ways. Ultimately, every Christian must ask himself whether he can be Christian and rich simultaneously. Could anyone who professes to love others hoard wealth while his fellow man wails in need? Does a Christian have the right to take any more than what he needs? Even then, he must always ask himself whether his needs can be reduced any further to help others. Therefore, Christians have a responsibility to use wealth to grow the Body of Christ, not to shower ourselves with luxuries.

The Body of Christ is grown not necessarily by building beautiful churches, for God Himself told us that He has no need for temples when the whole world belongs to Him (45). Instead, the Body of Christ grows when those in need are helped through Christian love, and when Christians free themselves from the shackles of opulence. This does not mean that all Christians must live as paupers, for God will equip people differently for the jobs that they must do in this world. For example, when it came time for the Hebrews to grow, God gave them all the land they needed. The needy are placed in their positions with the permission of God. While a Christian's desire must always be to give all of his possession instantly for the love of God and others, his actions must be tempered with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and his wisdom. A Christian who works continuously yet blindly may achieve far less than the one who seeks God's guidance every step he takes and paces his strength (spiritual, physical, material, and financial) for the war against evil. In each Christian's time, he will be called upon to give his entirety to God. At that moment, he must rise beyond himself and beyond the bonds of this world. It is declared that all true Christians will be persecuted (46).

As another reminder for Christians, everything in this world serves to test us and purify us. Therefore, a Christian must never have prejudices. God judges the hearts of men, and the hearts of men must be what a Christian sees (47). When a beggar walks through the door of a church, he may be far closer to the Kingdom of God than the banker with the most offering. When an uneducated person speaks there may be more truth in his voice than that of the greatest academicians. A Christian must see beyond all the standards that this world imposes. This is especially true when selecting leaders for God's people. The most important quality of Christian leaders is that they are pure in faith and strong in love. As a result, they will be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then gives the power to do God's work. Some will be given wisdom, some oratorical talents, and some great skills for organization. If we select our leaders based on superficial skills measured by human means, their capabilities may not necessarily come from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that we

must be good at small things so that we can be good at big things. Therefore, a Christian leader must first be able to lead his own family, spouse and children, before he can lead others (48). The great danger to Christians is being led astray. Thus, all false prophets must be revealed and all those around us must be governed by the Holy Spirit. While no leader can be perfect, if he cannot proclaim that he belongs to Jesus then he is not a Christian, no matter how much he uses the name of Christ. If he does not recognize that Christ came as a human being, then whatever spirit that gives him power is not the Holy Spirit but an enemy of Christ (49).

Knowing that the world lives in God's perfect plan, we have no right to complain about our positions and fates in life. God is the creator; if He makes one person for a more special purpose than another, that is His right. As His friend, we know that all of us are made in a way that the whole of humanity is brought into God's love in the best way. If some of us must suffer so that the whole is made greater, then we should embrace our suffering willingly. Yet, in God's perfection we grow our spirits as we sacrifice ourselves to grow the spirits of others (50).

To be a Christian is to ultimately imitate Christ by embracing His teachings. Thus, John taught us that a Christian must never insult someone, for not even the Archangel Michael would insult Satan (51). By insulting someone, even the Dark One himself, you will be lowering yourself to his level. Therefore, to be a Christian is to stop hating and brooding in anger. There are those who claim that Jesus acted in anger against merchants at the temple (52). If we read the gospels carefully, the only thing that we can conclude is that Jesus acted in force and conviction against something that was wrong. There were definitely no insults and no cursing even though everything was within His right. Only God and His Son, who see all things with perfect clarity, have the right to be angry. While we may be angry at evil, man has no right to be angry at people and events when our understanding of this world is so lacking. The world is this way not due to evil but due to God's design. God's design is this way, because the good must carefully be separated from evil so that not a bit of good that could be saved is lost.

To increase faith, Christians are encouraged to confess sins to one another, for the root of sin is that which causes us to turn away from God and from one another (53). By declaring that we will not let sin distance our hearts from others, we will have won half the battle. We must recognize that God knows and understands every sinful act that occurs in this world. He also knows that we are at times vulnerable to them. We are foolish in thinking that we can hide what is in our hearts from God. What we will be doing is moving away from God. Therefore, we should always be dragging the deepest and darkest side of ourselves in front of God and begging for purification. However, it is not always easy to present our sins to the light of goodness, because the sins themselves will push us to hide in shame. Thus, at times it may be easier to first present our sins to fellow Christians, fellow sinners to whom we can relate. With their support, we can then approach the Lord.

The final subject of this section deals with a controversial issue in our times. The world teaches us that men and women are equal, and many laws are created in democratic states to enforce such equality. This may be in direct opposition to the Bible, which demonstrates that men and women are equal only in their capacity for spiritual salvation, the only thing that matters. Just as God places people in different positions and stations in life, one is born as a man or woman in order to address one's spiritual needs and the needs of others. The Bible teaches women to obey men to strengthen their capacity to obey God. The Bible teaches men to love women as God loves man to elevate their capacity to love. By these teachings, women in this world should achieve equality, if it is important to them, not by force but through the loving expression of men. If men cannot express such magnitude of love, then they have failed in the teachings of the Bible. If women try to elevate their position in defiance of men, then they too have failed in the teachings of the Bible. This issue is important enough that Paul specifically affirmed that, while Christianity has very few traditions and rituals, Christian women should cover their heads in public prayer and in spreading the gospel (54). Furthermore, Christian women should not teach at meetings (55). In imitation of the great love of Jesus, Christian men may wish to declare to Christian women that whatever they decide

among themselves shall be accepted. However, before Christian women quickly denounce such teachings of Paul as silly and obsolete, they may wish to ask themselves whether they are able to humble themselves before men. If they cannot, perhaps they are too enslaved by the meaningless values and status of this world. In conclusion, Christian men and women should all remember that Christ our Lord came as a servant and that the greatest are those who lower themselves.

CHAPTER II

THE ACT

While those who accept and believe the Word upon hearing it are the most fortunate ones, the mission of Jesus is far more than presenting man with the truth of God. The Word revealed to us that a thought in the mind, or a feeling of the spirit, is not made whole unless there is action to embrace it. In the Old Testament, when humanity was young, God gave us strict rules, and His actions were often harsh but just. With the New Covenant, God showed us how He has always loved us, and now we are able to grasp the depth of God's love with more clarity. With the sacrifice of Jesus, God showed the magnitude of His love for man. Through the sacrifice, our just God rightfully made His New Covenant with all the nations of the world. If people obeyed the Ten Commandments perfectly, the presentation of the Word would not have been necessary to save the spirit of man (1). If the Word alone can make people understand, Jesus would not have had to come personally to teach us. However, man is weak and needs far more. Therefore while Jesus was with us, teaching the truth of God, His every action affirmed His words. Through the miracles of Jesus, we learn about the power of faith, the acts of love, and the ways of God. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the miracles of Jesus. The second section discusses the sacrifice of Jesus. The third section discusses the work of the apostles.

SECTION II.1:

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

The first set of Jesus' miracles and teachings that we will discuss is based on the faith of men and women. When a gentile woman came to Jesus to plead for the cure of her daughter who was possessed by a demon, Jesus revealed that His coming was for the Jews, God's first chosen. Indeed, while Jesus was still with us, His disciples were instructed to preach only to Hebrews. Thus, it was not right to give the food of children, the Jews, to feed the dogs, the other people of this world. However, with great humility the woman said that even dogs are permitted to eat the leftovers of the children at their master's table. Jesus responded to her faith and cured the daughter (1). Her faith transformed her into a child of God.

On another occasion a paralyzed man had friends whose faith in Jesus was so great that after trying every way to reach Jesus, they lowered him through a hole in the roof (2). Seeing such supporting faith, Jesus forgave his sins and commanded the man to walk. To all those who challenged Jesus' authority to forgive sins, Jesus retorted that it is easier to forgive sins than to heal illnesses. The implication is that our afflictions are always with the direct permission of God, in contrast to sin, which is man's violation of God's will. However, our strength of faith is what God cares about, and through it our sins can be forgiven. In another situation, a blind beggar called out to Jesus. When others told him to stop shouting, he shouted even louder. As a result of his persistence, God answered and cured him (3).

One of the most interesting demonstrations of faith was revealed when a woman with a bleeding disease fought to touch Jesus' cloak and was instantly healed as she believed she would be (4). At the same time Jesus felt the power leaving Him and asked about her until she admitted what she had done. Jesus proclaimed that her faith healed her. If our faith stretches out our spirits to touch God, perhaps a faith that is strong enough can actually touch the Spirit of

God and Jesus, especially when They are near, to share in Their power. This is quite different from pleading for the Spirit of Jesus to stretch out and touch us. This also implies that the event was not by the will of Jesus. Instead, maybe the power of God is always open for man to share if we are spiritually strong enough to touch Him.

The final miracle of faith that we will discuss involves a Roman centurion whose servant was very ill at home (5). The centurion came to Jesus and proclaimed that all Jesus needed to do was to will it so and his servant would be healed. Seeing such faith, far beyond those of any Jew, Jesus willed it so. Thus, we are made to understand that Jesus and God are truly one. With the power of God everything is possible with a single thought. If your faith is limited by this physical world then that is the extent in which your faith will work, i.e., touching the cloak of Jesus. To those whose faith is pure enough, this physical world has no hold on them. To them, Jesus has never left but is always with them, no matter where they are. If one can spiritually touch Jesus, why should one care about touching Jesus physically? All things are an extension of the spirit. Thus, pure Christians have no reliance on symbols, relics, or other crutches for our faith.

Driving Out Demons

The second set of miracles pertains to the power to drive out demons and evil spirits possessing humans. In later sections, we will explore the subject of a war in Heaven at the birth of Jesus, which resulted in Satan and his dark angels being cast down to earth. For now, we may wish to consider the possibility that, as a result of Satan being cast to earth, there was a dramatic increase in demonic activities on earth at the time of Jesus. Demons could be evil spirits that at one time inhabited Heaven as lesser angels. It is well documented that Jesus drove out evil spirits, which often caused body contortions, deafness, dumbness, and even blindness, in people (6). The evil spirits often recognized Jesus as the Son of God and God's Holy Messenger (7). However, Jesus ordered them to keep His identity a secret. They obeyed Him, because Satan and his minions work on earth to condemn themselves and others only with

the permission of God. Thus, the beings of darkness know very well the truth of Jesus. The power which Jesus gave to His disciples to drive out demons shows that the Kingdom of God has already come, and it shall grow to the last day to bring about a new Heaven and Earth.

Demons, like the angels in Heaven, have different levels of power. There are servants, lords, and princes who were once archangels. In one case when a demon was powerful enough to enter a boy, the disciples failed to drive it out. Jesus criticized their lack of faith and indicated that this type of demon can only be driven out by prayer (8). This implies that the power associated with the normal acts of faith by the disciples was not strong enough. Instead, the disciples must pray, stretch out to God to receive greater power and perhaps intervention from God. Jesus reminded us that faith makes everything possible and prayer fortifies faith. When Pharisees questioned whether Jesus' power to drive out demons could have come from Satan, Jesus retorted that even Satan would not abandon one of his own or the kingdom of darkness would crumble (9).

In one situation where a man was possessed by a mob of demons, Jesus drove them into pigs rather than banishing them, because the demons declared that the time for their punishment had not yet arrived. Jesus then made the pigs drown themselves (10). The dark forces not only recognized God's plan, but also the punishment that they deserve. Interestingly, the cured man wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus refused him. The fact that so many demons could enter him may imply that he was spiritually weak and impure. The man was told to transform or else the demons would return.

Healing Non-believers

The last collection of healing miracles by Jesus consists of those directed at non-believers. Thus, the approach of Jesus is quite interesting. With people of strong faith we have seen that the power of Christ pouring into them, healing them according to their faith. The spirits of non-believers are often not awake enough to receive the power of God. In such cases, the descriptions of Jesus' actions in the gospels lead us to the speculation that He had to use His power to correct the physical body instead of giving the power to

the body so that it could heal itself. In the case where a man was born blind, Jesus applied mud to his face and created new eyes for him as God created man from the soil (11). This act does not necessarily mean that Jesus must use mud. Instead, the power required to alter the world may increase as one goes from transmuting one form of matter to another, to transforming energy into matter, and to creating matter from nothingness. Naturally, Jesus and God would take the most efficient approach, such as changing mud into eyes, instead of creating eyes altogether. Jesus said that in this case the man was born blind specifically to show the power of God. In the case of a deaf man, Jesus spat into and touched the man's ear to command it to open up (12). When Peter cut off a slave's ear in defense of Jesus, Jesus touched the man and regenerated the ear (13).

On other occasions, Jesus healed so that people would believe and stop sinning, i.e., the paralyzed man by the pool and the official's son who was ill at home (14). In one situation Jesus cured a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, which was in violation of the laws, to show that He is our shepherd with the right to save His own sheep at any time (15).

Leprosy was identified as a punishment from God as described in the books of Moses. Therefore, when Jesus cured lepers, He demonstrated that He was given full authority to reverse God's actions. In the case of curing ten lepers, only the one gentile leper came back to thank Jesus (16). This may be a sign that the gentiles have the qualities to receive God's blessing in the future.

In one of the most unique cases of healing, Jesus spat into a blind man's eyes which resulted in his seeing the village people as trees. Then Jesus touched the man again and he was able to see the people as people (17). A possible theory is that Jesus initially made the man's vision so good that he saw people as they really are, hard and motionless on the inside. Then Jesus had to reduce his vision so that he could only see the surface. Supporting this theory, Jesus commanded the man to not return to the village.

Commanding Nature

Through a series of miracles Jesus demonstrated that the whole world obeyed His commands as the world obeys God, and that all the actions in this world are interlocked across time. When Jesus needed a coin, a fish which had swallowed the coin earlier came to Him (18). When Jesus wanted to calm a storm, a word was sufficient (19). One day Jesus walked on water toward His disciples on a boat. Initially, when Peter's faith was not disrupted, he too was able to walk on water toward Jesus (20). With strong enough faith, everything is possible. In a unique event, Jesus commanded a fruitless fig tree to wither (21). With this act of authority, Jesus showed that plants and animals are meant for man's benefit. For man, just the act of destruction alone is not that significant. It is the defiance of God's plan, often associated with destruction, that is the true heart of sin.

In commanding nature, Jesus may have also taken the most efficient approach. In the two cases of feeding thousands of people, Jesus used existing fish and bread as a blueprint to replicate enough food to feed the masses (22). Jesus saved a wedding banquet by turning water into fine wine (23). Mary, Jesus' mother, also attended the wedding and knew about Jesus' powers.

Resurrecting the Dead

The last demonstration of God's power through Jesus is resurrection. To this day the details of resurrection are kept in secrecy. After bringing Jairus' daughter back to life, Jesus ordered the parents not to tell anyone what exactly happened (24). Perhaps the soul was recalled into the body as it was journeying to its rest. In the case of a widow's son, he was brought back to life in a coffin which conveniently blocked any observation of the process (25). In the case of Lazarus, he came back to life in a burial cave and then walked out (26). In all these cases, Jesus recalled the spirit to return to the body out of pity, compassion, and love.

SECTION II.2:

THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS

God created this world so that man can be brought into the cradle of His love. Jesus brought us the truth of God so that we can find the purity to receive God's love. Jesus showed us miracles because some of us need miracles to strengthen our faith. However, the greatest demonstration of Jesus' and God's love for us is Jesus' self-sacrifice in accordance with God's permission. Christians are taught that Jesus died for our sins and in His death our salvation is affirmed. Yet, many non-believers have asked why Jesus had to die if God is all-powerful. There is no simple way to explain the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for God's first chosen people, the Hebrews, and eventually for the rest of the world.

The fact is that Jesus, as a being of the spirit who is God's first born perfect Son, has been with God in Heaven since the beginning of creation. God created the world through Him and built all the future events around Jesus' deeds as the guardian of the tree of humanity. No one loves us more than God, but God cannot oppose goodness, not even for us, for He Himself is goodness. Jesus, however, is completely for us. His love for us has no demands, no conditions. Even when we betray Him, His love endures. In Heaven Jesus stood above the angels, above Satan when Satan still dwelled there. Yet for us, Jesus came to earth in physical form with all the limitations of the human body. The great acts of Jesus as revealed in the gospels were not accomplished because He had a special better-than-human body, but because His is a perfect spirit in an average body. There is no way to describe fully what it meant for the Son of God, who had been dwelling in Heaven with all the beauty, love, and unity which transcends human perception, to give them up in order to see everything through human eyes. Who else could have forsaken the highest position beside God to be bound by a human body? It is like asking us to give up all our senses and feelings to be trapped in a box where we can see only faint glimpses of light.

Yet, Jesus came because of His love for both God and mankind. God's will and our salvation must be achieved. The birth of Jesus reflects the greatness of His work. Through the Holy Spirit, God empowered John the Baptist to be born before Jesus to announce the good news. Through the Holy Spirit, God formed the body of Jesus in the virgin Mary (1). At the time of birth, the Lord led not the nobles of Israel, but shepherds pure of heart and wise men from distant lands, to the humble manger which sheltered Mary and Joseph. Since the pains of giving birth is a trial God placed on woman for being with man, Christians might wish to think about the possibility that the birth of Jesus was humanity's only painless birth.

To add to the sacrifice and His insult, Jesus was given to Satan for forty days before beginning His work so that Satan may have his chances to tempt Him towards evil (2). As we will see later, when Jesus was born a war of the angels raged in Heaven over this gift to humanity. As a result, Satan and his followers were cast out of Heaven to inhabit earth. Since God is just, He granted Satan powers on earth to tempt all and in so doing condemn himself. On earth Satan will earn God's wrath on the [mal day. One may wonder how anyone could endure the forty days of continuous temptation that Jesus went through. Satan tempts the rest of humanity with a few deceptive words now and then, especially when we are weak. For forty days both God and Jesus had to withstand the ultimate insult by permitting the vilest of the vile to rise and have his moment. This insult They endured for us. While Jesus was on earth His priority was to save God's first chosen. God is patient and just. Therefore, He will never break His Covenant unless His people have committed the ultimate betrayal. Since the recording of the Book of Life, God had known that His people would reject Him. As Jesus carried the truth of God across Israel, He had to endure the ridicule from people who should belong to Him. Yet He took all the ridicule with only the truth as His sword. He did not command the angels in Heaven or the demons on earth to declare Him the King of kings, nor did He use the forces of nature to make others kneel before Him. Instead, His power and glory were reserved for those who would follow Him.

After being guided by God for centuries, the Jews should have recognized what Jesus taught was the truth of God. Yet only a small fraction of the Jews came to Jesus while the rest, led by their blind leaders, rejected the truth of God and accused Jesus. The Jews crucified Jesus on the cross, thus affirming their complete rejection of God's truth and love. As a result, God was then free to offer the truth to the rest of world. In such a way the Jews unwittingly yielded their birth right. Yet as long as they try to be with God, God will continue to lead the nation of Israel to Him.

The crucifixion of Jesus is a sacrifice beyond imagination. If a person has always eaten honey, does a lime not taste ten times more bitter to him? Therefore, how much pain did Jesus, a heavenly being, feel when the nails pierced His wrists and ankles? How could any father bear such treatment of his son? Yet God bore it for man. At the last moment Jesus cried out, "Why have You left me?" leaving many to wonder indeed why (3). The answer may be that God did pull away from Jesus. What father could let his son die in his arms? Therefore, God probably had to turn away to let His Son die, and to let His first chosen people commit the ultimate betrayal. Jesus could have easily made the nails bend, but He willingly surrendered to physical death so that a new covenant could be made for the world.

Jesus was praying at Gethsemane on the night of His arrest for crucifixion. He asked God the Father to take away this cup of suffering if it be God's will (4). Some Christians view this as a sign that Jesus, while He was with us, was very much human with human weakness. Alternatively, Christians may wish to consider that praying for other solutions before sacrificing one's life is not a sign of weakness but an act of cherishing the life of this world that God offered. Christians should not be too eager to seek martyrdom. True sacrifices must be God's will. Also, the suffering that Jesus spoke of may not refer to the pain of the body in crucifixion. The pain of witnessing His own people reject Him and condemning themselves may have been far greater. After all, Jesus had cared for the Jews since their beginning.

After the sacrifice of the Lamb, the New Covenant was then formed not only because of the actions of the Jews, but also because

of the totality of Jesus' sacrifice on earth. We have discussed that, with the New Covenant, we are freed from the laws that condemn. Instead, God reaches into us with the Holy Spirit to guide us to Him through our hearts. We may ask why God waited so long to give us the Holy Spirit. First, the rest of humanity had to be placed in positions, through their free will, to receive Jesus. Also, the course of the Jewish nation had to reach a certain state after God's prophets had been sent. Further, the gift of the Spirit hinged on Jesus' completing His mission. While on earth Jesus experienced everything that man experienced: hunger, pain, internal biochemical impacts on our emotions, as well as the world's temptations. Thus, for the first time Jesus, the perfect Son of God, experienced what it is like to be man. When He returned to be united with God, God experienced what it is like to be man. In so doing, He reached out to us. He now sees us not only through God's eyes but also through man's. The God of the Old Testament is a perfect God who could not possibly be touched by imperfection. On the cross Jesus became the bridge through which imperfect man could touch God. Through that bridge, all the souls that went to the World of the Dead before and after the arrival of Jesus will also be given the Word, and some will be able to cross over to God. In the end, Jesus sacrificed for all the dead, the living, and those yet to be. The sins of all those who embrace the Word are washed away by the blood of Jesus. For as the Holy Spirit descends into us, evil's hold is broken.

As Jesus was dying on the cross, the lessons for Christians continued. A criminal on the cross beside Jesus accepted Jesus as Lord and repented. At the brink of death, he received salvation and was freed from the grasp of the World of the Dead. His salvation showed that as long as there is life there is hope. It is truly the quality of our spirits as we leave this life that counts, even if the spirit bursts to life as the body is dying (5). In Jesus' most excruciating moment, His words were not those of anger or fear. Instead, He asked God to forgive those responsible for His death (6). Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of all His teachings: love, kindness, mercy, and understanding. He is the perfect Son of God.

Three days after the crucifixion, Jesus returned to His disciples in spirit and body to empower them with the Holy Spirit and to

teach them what they must do. God then took the food of His chosen people and gave it to the world so that all of us, those who have died and those who still live, may be brought into the light of His love. After preparing the disciples, Jesus returned to Heaven to prepare the Kingdom of God that is to come (7). Some proclaim that Christianity would be meaningless without Jesus' resurrection. In response, this disciple must say that if Christians need evidence, then the evidence must be the teachings of Jesus, which only the Son of God could provide. If Christians need physical evidence, then the Bible is mere words to them and the story of the resurrection is only a story recorded by men. If we cannot believe that Jesus is the Son of God unless we see Him return, then how can we believe the story of the resurrection unless we were actually there two thousand years ago witnessing it for ourselves. With the truth that Jesus brought, we should know that He is one with God. Since He is one with God, He surely rose after death.

Jesus revealed to us that for the three days between His death and resurrection, He descended into Hell (8). We will reveal later that even to this day there is nothing and no one in Hell, for Hell is a place reserved for final judgment when God's plan is complete. It is a place for Satan, his dark angels, and all those of humanity that evil has conquered. In those three days Jesus prepared Hell for the last day and after Jesus returned to Heaven He began preparing the Kingdom of Heaven also for that last day. Until then, as we will see in discussing the Book of Revelation, those who embraced the Word shall rest in waiting, and the rest of the world shall continue to be placed in the World of the Dead to be given the Word in full clarity.

SECTION II.3:

THE WORK OF THE APOSTLES

The apostles were chosen to lead the Body of Christ. Therefore, in their actions and words they embodied the truth of God. Through their actions, we, the rest of Christ's disciples, see what it means to love God and one another. We see the qualities that please God, for they were chosen, as Jesus promised, to sit on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom of Heaven that is to come (1).

The first quality that we see is the apostles' faith. When Peter, John, and James, the three fishermen, were called by Jesus, they dropped everything and followed Him. Jesus did not have to teach them about the truth of God or perform miracles to make them believe. The quality of their spirits was so pure that they immediately recognized Jesus as Lord (2). As Peter proclaimed, his only hesitation was that he was a sinner. How many of us are burning with such humility that we know our place in God's plan? Peter was the first to come to Jesus and had the strongest faith. His faith was so strong that it took him across the water to join Jesus in walking on Lake Galilee (3). However, his faith was not strong enough to overcome his fears, eventually causing him to fall into the water. In this incident, Peter showed the solidity of his faith. Yet Jesus declared that he was weak in faith. Peter was used to show how weak we all are. In Jesus' hour of torment, Peter in fear rejected Jesus three times as Jesus had predicted. Thus, Christians everywhere are taught that fear is the greatest enemy to faith. When we have won the battle over hate, over greed, over arrogance, we Christians may still in a moment of weakness fall prey to fear. Thus, James warned us to never doubt Jesus (4).

While the apostles were with Jesus, they drew their power from Jesus through their faith. However, the Spirit of God was not yet given to them. Thus, while we see a group of disciples who were given the power to heal and drive out demons, they were still children in their understanding of the truth of God. Jesus taught through

words, but their understanding was limited by their mental interpretation of the words. Thus, we read about apostles fighting over foolish things, such as who among them was the greatest (5). We see apostles always doubting the power of Jesus, and we see apostles not attentive and asleep (6).

Once Jesus' sacrifice was complete, God sent down His Holy Spirit to transform the disciples of Jesus. They saw this Spirit descend as tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit did not merely give the apostles the power to heal and drive out demons. In fact, those were the least of God's gifts. Additionally, it gave the apostles true understanding and the ability to express their understanding with power at key moments (7). In the early days, when facing their persecutors, the apostles and disciples gave eloquent and powerful orations that revealed the heart of Christianity. When the apostles and the disciples wrote, every word elucidated the meaning of Christianity. It is the Holy Spirit that inspired men to write works that endured the centuries. Our modern Bible is what God has willed for us to receive. To question the accuracy of the Bible therefore is to question whether God would permit false teachings to be passed to us in His Book. Even though the Bible is flawless, our interpretation of the truth of God is incomplete and inaccurate to this day. Jesus has given us the meaning to everything. Yet we, who are weak in faith, still struggle with even the most basic meaning.

Beyond healing and driving out of demons, the apostles performed other miracles that reflected the power of Jesus. In one case, Peter brought a person back to life in a process not to be revealed to us (8). The prophet Elijah was another mortal man who was recorded as having this power. In another case, Paul jumped on a dying person and declared that he was all right (9). Perhaps his action was to prevent the soul from leaving the body.

In looking at the miracles of the apostles, we must recognize that they serve solely to strengthen the faith of man. God does not need man to conduct miracles. If He wants one to be well, that person will be instantly healed. The universe obeys the Lord and everything is by His plan. This is why the apostles never used the powers of the Holy Spirit to heal themselves. When Paul had an ailment, he asked

God to take it away. Yet God responded that He wanted Paul to suffer so that his spirit would remain pure and strong. Thus, when Christians face adversity, let us not pray for a miracle but for the guidance of the Lord and a greater understanding of His will.

Despite their power and insight, the Bible shows that the apostles were not perfect. Jesus was the only perfect one because of His perfect spirit. The attainment of the perfect spirit is the goal that we must always strive for but can never achieve. The apostles, like us, struggled to know God but often faltered in their endeavors. Peter's understanding faltered when it took visual evidence for him to believe that God would pour out His Spirit to Jews and Gentiles alike. Both Paul's and Barnabas' understanding faltered when they argued about ways to spread Christianity, for arguing is not the way of Christianity. They showed that while the Body of Christ should be one, Christians in their weakness may often not work as one. In their parting of ways, it is shown that with great sadness the Church of God will divide over and over again based on differences in understanding.

In the ultimate act of leadership and sacrifice, the apostles showed us the strength of Christian faith through their martyrdom. Jesus taught them that no student can surpass the master. If the world murders the master, the pupil can expect no better. And so, one by one, starting with the stoning of the disciple Stephen, the apostles and disciples gave up their lives to receive eternal life. Peter was crucified upside-down at his request because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus. Paul was beheaded in Rome. And according to history, Christians were fed to the lions in the Colosseum of Rome. In their sacrifices we see that people in all their weakness can transcend themselves to overcome the greatest of fears with bold faith in God. The promise of Jesus is true, and the faith that Jesus spoke of is attainable. The apostles who laid down their lives in the end were no longer the children who fought over who was the greatest. Thus, they are worthy to sit on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel.

CHAPTER III

THE UNDERSTANDING

The reason why the Old Testament has not been discussed until now is because a Christian must read the Old Testament with the power and understanding that Jesus has given. The Old Testament, which starts with five books written by Moses and guided directly by God, records the work of God from the creation of the universe to His gradual surrendering of His chosen people to corruption and the kings of this world. It also tells of God's plan and enduring patience for His chosen people and the rest of the world as events move towards the coming of the Messiah and final day of judgment. Like the New Testament, it is what God has permitted to be passed down to the people of the world.

The greatest desire of every person should be to love God. To love God is to strive continuously to better understand His plan and to serve Him willingly in the fulfillment of His plan. The fundamental difference between Christians and Jews is that Christians see the plan of God with the truth that Jesus brought to us. While accepting Jesus is completely interlocked with this vision of the truth of God, the non-acceptance of Jesus should not be the factor that divides Christians and Jews. Since our Savior Jesus has forgiven the Jews for rejecting Him, we can do no less. For the Jews, if we both truly worship the one true God as demonstrated by our embrace of the Old Testament, then it is up to God to reject or forgive any of our offenses. We both pray to the true God. While Jews pray as His chosen people under His commandments, we Christians pray in the name of Jesus, who teaches the meaning of God's commandments and offers God's forgiveness of our sins.

In this chapter, we shall journey into a story that may surprise or even shock Christians and Jews. Any attempt to advance our understanding is bound to surprise us and shake our foundations. Yet, since the days of Abraham, our understanding of God's plan has continuously advanced by the design and help of God, leaping

forward with the special servants of God: Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, etc. It also slowly moves forward with the diligent efforts of all God's servants.

To advance our understanding, we should consider using every resource that God has provided for us, even science. For centuries, men of God and men of science have often opposed each other in the understanding of man's existence and the universe. As men of God, we should carefully look at science and focus on what we are actually opposing. Science rests on two foundations: the gathering of physical evidence and the construction of theories to explain such evidence. First, we must question whether the God who controls the universe would provide false evidence for our senses that confuse our quest to reach out to Him. This disciple's faith leads him to the view that everything in this world aids us in reaching out to God. There may be missing pieces of evidence that man has not yet found, and there may be false conclusions. Sadly, because of weakness, men see the works of God but lose sight of God.

If the evidence gathered by scientists could be used by men of God, then our concern should be on theories. A scientific theory links the body of evidence to describe how the universe works, yet does it have to exclude God? Perhaps scientific theories have evolved away from God partly because some men of God throughout history have concluded that scientific attempts to understand God's plan are equivalent to attempts at defining God. God revealed to us early in human history that He is beyond human description, which bounds and limits. It is clearly not the position of mortal man to define God. Unfortunately, this often leaves the body of scientific data in the hands of people who do not believe in God. Naturally, many theories are then built without the presence of God or in opposition to the validity of God. If scientific data is also what God has permitted us to receive, then Christians seeking to better serve God's plan must walk a very difficult path on which only faith and the Holy Spirit can lead them. This is a path that starts with the gift of Jesus, focuses on the recorded work of God, and engulfs the body of physical evidence around us. There can be but one truth for the universe. If science can gather all the evidence in the world,

then there would only be one viable theory, the theory of God's work, or the truth of God's work for Christians. Until that day, Christian scholars must face the challenge of combining the current body of scientific data with what we know about God's work as mentioned in the Holy Bible. If non-Christians can only see the world through the mind and not through the spirit, perhaps the presentation of Christian scientific theories will light their spiritual fire.

The journey ahead in this chapter is not a challenge to existing Christian views. It is simply one disciple's very limited understanding of God's work, realizing that the total works of God are beyond man's capacity to fully grasp. Even the total knowledge revealed to us through the Bible is beyond this disciple's ability to address. Thus, the discussion that follows will be very general and crude. At most, it may heighten one's desire to explore the Bible and find God.

The following discussion is divided into three sections. Section one starts with God's creation of the universe and continues to the beginning of Jewish history with Moses. Section two starts with the salvation of God's people from Egypt and extends to the coming of Jesus. Section three starts with Jesus and ends with the Kingdom of God that is to come.

SECTION III.1: IN THE BEGINNING

The Christian understanding of the works of the one true God begins with God creating the universe through Jesus. The universe that God created stretched out across space and time, and the purpose of God's creation, which is to grow the tree of humanity, is only to be met at the end of time. Beyond our ability to fathom, at the point of creation God knew how this creation of His will change and interact across time. He knew who would be born a thousand years from the point of creation, down to the number of hairs on his head. He also designed the events of the world for the growth of man. Further, God planned His interaction with man and the world for the growth of man. Even though God knows everything that must be done when He interacts with man, He must nevertheless be the God of the moment. When man can only understand anger, God will be angry. When man will only change by punishment, God will punish. In revealing His truth to man, He will tell enough to encourage man to serve His will and not so much that man will lose his dedication. For example, if telling a man that he will receive great wealth causes him to not work hard, then God may not tell him. God will reveal more to those who are more dedicated to Him and have the capacity to understand what He reveals. The greatest part of creation is structuring everything around the work that Jesus must do to guide, feed, support, and protect the tree of humanity. In a simplistic way, the purpose of creation is to produce more children for God and brothers for Jesus, the perfect first Son of God. On the last day of God's work, the day of judgment, God's family will dwell in the Kingdom of God surrounded by the angels in union, love, joy, and peace. Since the Lord knows the result of His work, all the future members of His family have already been entered into the Book of Life at the point of creation (1).

The one difficulty in God's act of creation is the existence of evil. Evil taints the spirit and pulls it away from God. The

angels in Heaven are not able to free themselves of evil and thus must remain as God's servants instead of His children. Some of them, such as Satan, were so dominated by evil that they rebelled against the Almighty God and were forced to exist as God's unwilling slaves. Therefore in creating man, God had to structure the universe to cleanse this evil from man. Unfortunately, some branches of the tree of humanity cannot be saved and must be cut off. Evil is the true enemy of God. At the completion of God's work, all those lost to evil will be cast into the fires of Hell that burns forever.

In the beginning, God created the universe in six days. Man can only perceive time based on everything that changes around him. For us, a day is described as one rotation of the Earth, which is steady with respect to other changes in the world. Before Earth was created, there were only the days of God. A day for God, we can only speculate, is the amount of work that God does with a break-point. Based on this interpretation, each day of God does not have to conform to the concept of equal intervals of time as established by man, for God exists beyond this concept of time that binds the world. If God so wishes, He could accelerate or decelerate all the changes of this universe and no one in this universal reference frame would ever perceive any change.

On the first day of God, He created the universe as a raging ocean that covered everything in darkness. Then God willed light to burst forth (2). By today's cosmology, scientists have discovered evidence of the Big-Bang which brought light and energy to the universe and sent matter flying outwards over fifteen billion human years ago. According to the Bible, God began the universe with a sea of primal matter that covered space and God forced it together for the Big-Bang.

On the second day of God, He formed a dome of fluid, as seen by Moses, that is separated from the fluid in the sky (3). Based on science, this would be gaseous matter that traveled outwards from the Big-Bang, spinning and concentrating into spheres that became planets and stars.

On the third day of God, He turned the fluid in the dome into the earth and sea. From it, plants that would become those that bore fruits and those that bore grain came forth (4). Scientific data

tells us that a sphere of fluid collapsed upon itself to form the planet Earth some 4.5 billion years ago. The appearance of early plants, algae and other single celled life, started four billion years ago. Through the manipulation of God, these plants evolved into seed plants 400 million years ago. The scientific theory of evolution has been the main force opposing creationism in the twentieth century. Therefore, we must understand this theory in order to proceed. The core of this theory states that animal and plant life started as basic single cell life. Through generations of selection, some variations of life were halted while others continued to evolve and propagate. There is substantial scientific evidence which backs this idea in the gradual advancement of life. Non-believers might conclude that God does not exist because life came about by a series of random and natural selection. Christians might also wonder why God would create the creatures of this world in such an intricate manner. Why did He not simply command them to appear? For the rest of this chapter we will discuss how God grew the tree of humanity through the centuries by allowing those of the right spiritual quality to have many offsprings, while wiping out whole nations because they were spiritually lost. To this disciple, it is clear that God would create plants and animals in a manner that reflects the process of human growth across the generations. The slow development of animals and plants is not random, but by the will of God. However, the Bible clearly tells us that man is not a product of such evolution. We will show how contradictory scientific evidence on man is not really contradictory.

On the fourth day of God, He created the Sun, Moon, and the stars. Immediately, this seems to challenge existing scientific theory. Yet if we explore this statement from a scientific standpoint, it is feasible. At the formation of the Earth when the first single-celled life forms came to be, the Sun may only have been a glowing ball of gas emitting a modest amount of light. The sun may have fully ignited, bursting forth with energy, after the solidification of the Earth. With the Sun, then one can see the Moon. Also, when the Earth was first formed, the solar system was probably still filled with a great deal of the energized gaseous matter in sky, in space. As a result, one may not be able to see the stars that were created

earlier and far away. When the Sun burst forth with energy, much of this interplanetary gas could have been washed away by the solar winds, exposing a clear open space to man on Earth. Therefore, if God placed Moses as a man standing on Earth seeing everything unfold, the sequence of events would be quite accurate.

On the fifth day of God, He created the aquatic animals and birds. According to scientific evidence, this would be from 600 million to 400 million years ago. This statement also places us at the center of an agelong scientific debate about the origin of birds. According to the Bible, birds evolved prior to the animals on land. Therefore, the scientific community may wish to focus on the theory that birds evolved directly from water animals that leaped into the air from the ocean, becoming flying creatures. The Bible specifically referenced water animals instead of just fishes. At that time, the sea could have been filled with all forms of water animals, some to become modern day fishes while others became ancient birds and the amphibians that crawled on land.

On the sixth day of God, He created the animals and human beings that resembled the spiritual beings in Heaven, including God. He made them male and female, and commanded them to have many children and spread across the earth to rule over it. According to science, this occurred from 325 million years ago and on.

On the seventh day of God, He rested. The rest would be equal to many human years.

The story of man, however, did not begin on the sixth day of God. God created Adam from soil before all the animals, before seed plants, and before the weather even formed on the new earth. God placed man in the garden of Eden, which is a place between Heaven and earth. From a stream in Eden, the water would become four major rivers running across the earth. In Eden Adam ate from the tree of life, which granted him immortality. Therefore, Adam could have been with God for millions of years as He finished His creation (5). However, Adam was told not to eat from the tree of knowledge, for that would make him like the beings in Heaven. On the sixth day of God, He decided that the time was right for Adam, man, to be transformed and start his journey to become the tree of humanity.

First, God created woman, Eve, from Adam to be his companion, and through them the tree of humanity would grow. Perhaps if man and woman had been able to obey God by not eating from the tree of knowledge, their spirits might have been pure enough for God to have eventually given them the fruit of knowledge. In such a case, man and woman would have directly ascended into the Kingdom of Heaven to be one with God and Jesus. However, this is pure speculation, for God knew that it was not to be so. Thus, He created the universe in preparation for the actions of man and woman. As it turned out, the spirits of man and woman were not free from the temptation of evil. In an act of disobedience they ate the fruit, thereby breaking away from God and becoming like the beings of Heaven. The transformed man and woman continued their break away by hiding from God. Interestingly, once like the beings in Heaven, man could try to hide from God. The God who controls and knows all the things in the universe searched for man because man became spiritually like Him and closed his spirit off to Him out of free will. Without anger, without shock, but maybe with sadness, God expelled them from Eden to the land God had prepared for them. God punished to strengthen and purify them. Yet God also showed them how to plant crops and survive. Once on their way, God also gave them desire for each other so that humanity would come forth through them. Thus, the sixth day of God ended, and the journey of man began.

When Adam and Eve bore Cain and Abel, God guided their sons as a parent would an infant. Accordingly, God tried to turn the spirit of Cain away from evil. However, when Cain killed Abel, God was still gentle yet firm. As punishment, He sent Cain out to wander the land. Yet, He also protected Cain from those that would kill him in the land beyond. The Bible also revealed that although Abel's actions pleased God, his spirit would be sent to the World of the Dead where it awaits judgment on the last day. Jesus revealed that in the World of the Dead, the good will receive His teachings and resurrect on the last day.

At this point, many may ask if Cain and Abel were the first sons of Adam, then who were those beyond their land that could have killed Cain? The Bible references them not as wild animals

but as intelligent beings that would recognize the mark of God. Scientific evidence revealed that a physiologically man-like being, *Homo erectus*, appeared 1.75 million years ago in Africa and spread out across Asia and Europe. Scientific evidence also revealed that another more advanced man-like being, *Homo sapiens*, appeared probably in one location 500,000 years ago and spread out across the world. A popular theory is that when *Homo sapiens*, with more advanced hunting and gathering skills, moved into regions, they forced the less advanced *Homo erectus* out of the food chain and into extinction. The being that God sent into the world, however, was not the hunting and gathering *Homo sapiens*. Instead, man was a farmer and a rancher who started the Neolithic Revolution around 8000-6000 BC as dated by science. The fact that man appeared in one location on earth would be consistent with some scientific theories. Like the *Homo sapiens*, man would then spread across the world and displace *Homo sapiens* from the food chain. As Cain the farmer ventured outward, he might have been the first man to confront groups of primitive *Homo sapiens*.

The world in which the descendants of Adam and Eve dwelled was a world very different from today. According to the Bible, heavenly beings were permitted by God to walk among men and even bear children with human women they found to be beautiful. We do not know anything about these heavenly beings. They might have been angels in Heaven or other creations of God in the universe. While the universe was created around Jesus and man, there is no reason why God would not create other beings more intelligent than man. What sets man above all other creatures is the quality of his spirit and not his intellectual power. In fact, God often chooses the dumb to show the intelligent that they are not so intelligent. Whoever these heavenly beings were, they most likely became the foundation of the Greek, Roman, and other pantheons of gods. The Bible tells of the children of these heavenly beings and human females as the giants and heroes long ago (6).

Another legend that could have come from ancient times is that of the highly intelligent dragon, which exists both in the stories of the East and West. In thinking about dragons, one must remember that the serpents of Eden were the most intelligent of

the animals and had four legs. Could it be that the effect of the serpent on man was so great that memories of them perpetually dwelled in men's subconscious for generations to form the stories of dragons?

After the failure of Cain, Adam and Eve had Seth and many other children. From Seth, man's relationship with God has always been the strongest with the first son. The relationship between God and Enoch was so pure that God took him to Heaven at the age of 365. Had Enoch lived out his full life of over 800 years, he would have seen the world defiled by the descendants of Adam and Eve. For ten generations, 1,656 years, God did not interfere with the world; perhaps this was His seventh day of rest. At the same time, mankind was given a just chance to find God by themselves. However, even given a life span of up to 900 years to purify their spirits and become God's children, mankind could not succeed. In a world where there were no rules placed by God, humanity went astray from God. When Noah was 600 years old, God came to examine His world and decided to trim the tree of humanity down to the main branch of Noah and his sons. As further indication that God used an evolutionary process to create the animals, He told Noah to save a pair of each type of animal on the ark. If God had created the animals with a simple instantaneous process instead of by evolution, then He might have simply destroyed all the animals in the flood and recreated them again.

The world that God destroyed with the great flood was not one with only a few primitive people. For ten generations, people lived for hundreds of years and had many children. If each couple had an average of twenty children and thus increased the world population by ten times per generation, then there could have been as many as 2,000,000,000 people by the time of Noah if there were no killings. Indeed, the Bible says that man spread all over the world. Later on, the Bible reveals that these people of ancient times were all sent to the World of the Dead (7).

These are the generations of ancient times as recorded by the first sons following Seth (8).

GENERATION	AGE HAVING FIRST SON	AGE AT DEATH
Adam	130	930
Seth	105	912
Enosh	90	905
Kenan	70	910
Mahalalel	65	895
Jared	162	800
Enoch	65	365 raptured
Methuselah	187	969
Lamech	182	777
Noah	500	950

Knowing what had to be done, God denied Noah children until he turned 500. Therefore, Noah's three sons were not tainted very much by the ancient world. Yet they retained many stories of the ancient world to create legends that spread across the world with the new growth of man. With Noah, the first age of man formally began. With this beginning God decided, according to His plan, that man shall not be given a 900 years life span to find God. Instead, man would have children at an earlier age and live no longer than 120 years. God would take hold of human development and mold each generation. The generations would occur faster and a generation's influence on following generations would be much more limited. In ancient times, Adam could have influenced seven generations down to Methuselah. After the flood, a man would be fortunate to see his great-grandson grow up. Again, God took an evolutionary approach and gradually reduced the life span of Noah's descendants down to 120 years through ten generations.

Right away with Noah's sons, the spirit of man was shown to be impure. When Noah was caught in a shameful situation, his youngest son, Ham, acted to expose this shame while his older sons, Shem and Ham, covered the shame (9). With the permission of God, Noah cursed the descendants of Canaan, son of Ham, and blessed the descendants of Japheth and Shem. History has shown that, indeed, the land settled by the descendants of Canaan was eventually given to special descendants of Shem to form Israel and fulfill this

proclamation by Noah. At this point, we must explore the reason why God selected first sons and why He would punish descendants for endless generations. We know that parents have a great influence on the spiritual development of children. Therefore, God must at times punish to counter the bad influence of parents. However, God also punished generations beyond parental influence. In that, we are led to the conclusion that the spiritual quality of the parents affects the inherent spiritual quality of the children. Spirits are born with the legacy of their origin. In the early days, when the tree of humanity was young and the branches were few, the spiritual impact of each branch on future generations must have been tremendous. Therefore, if one (i.e. Shem) showed promise, God would spend generations nurturing the spiritual legacy. If one (i.e. Ham) showed weakness, God would spend generations trying to beat the weakness out. At times when a branch was lost, the whole branch would have to be severed by God. If the interaction of the spirits from parent to child is as simple as good parents leading to good children, then God's work would have been easy and man's time would have been short. However, the new spirit is governed by many factors known only to God. We often see that when the parent reaches a spiritual peak, the quality of the child sometimes drops. For example, the children of Moses were not as spiritually pure as Moses. On the other hand, a spirit born of people far from God may suddenly burst into life. The first son is valued by God perhaps because most often the love between husband and wife is the purest and strongest at the conception of the first child. If this is the case, then one reason for marriage is that children can be conceived under a strong spiritual bond, not just lust. Further, perhaps women in ancient days were placed in such a subservient position to wash out the spiritual legacy of Eve.

Jesus revealed to us the strength in the unity of spirits for man. This was clearly demonstrated in the early days when the people gathered to build the Tower of Babel in the region of Mesopotamia. With this unity of humanity, the Lord proclaimed that soon they would be able to do anything. Ultimately, unity is God's hope for man. However, in those days humanity united without God and in opposition to God. Therefore God gave humanity different

languages and scattered them across the world to become different nations. God would then mold and shape each nation according to different destinies so that they all may some day find God.

If man was placed on earth around 6000 BC, then the flood should have occurred around 4400 BC. Archeology has shown that the first civilization was formed around the region of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Sumerian Empire emerged around 4000 BC. What is remarkable is that other civilizations emerged gradually as one moves away from Mesopotamia. As man moved outwards, the Old Kingdoms of Egypt started at around 3300 BC with pyramid building beginning at 2700 BC. In the opposite direction towards the East, the Harappa Civilization was formed in the Indus Valley in 3000 BC. As other groups continued to move outward in both the West and East, the Minoan Civilization of Crete formed around 2500 BC and the Hsia Dynasty of China formed between 2500 - 2000 BC. Following these early civilizations, other nations in the East and West grew to control the land from Europe to Asia. After almost two millennia, civilizations began to form in the distant lands of North and South America. By 0 BC, the Mayan Empire had emerged in Meso America, while the Moche and Nazca Empire grew in the Andes Mountains of South America. Even later, the Yoruba Empire of West Africa and the Zimbabwe Empire of South Africa formed around 1000 AD, after men had traversed the Sahara Desert and survived in the harsh land. As groups moved outwards, God caused their features to vary across the generations. Recent science has shown that the human genetic make-up is not as stable as we previously thought. In a thousand years or thirty generations, one might easily imagine the people in the North becoming light skinned, while the people in Africa became dark.

Nine generations after the flood, God called upon Abraham, the first son descendant of Shem, and revealed to him that he would be the father of nations. To Noah, God simply made a Covenant that He would never destroy the world again by flood. Also, He gave man permission to eat all the animals except their blood which carried life. Perhaps in ancient times, if man had eaten animals, he would have degenerated to the level of animals and be spiritually

lost. Perhaps with Noah, God selected the branch of man that would not become animalistic. By eating animals as a spiritually firm being, man affirms the fact that everything in this world is for him to use and even destroy with the permission of God. Nine generations later God increased man's understanding of His ways. He showed Abraham that He would select one branch of his family to foster as His own people. He would rescue these people from a distant land after 400 years of slavery. Within Abraham's lifetime God also showed that He had sent His angels to watch over the earth and continue to trim the tree of humanity. When a group of people, such as those in Sodom and Gomorra, was totally lost to evil, God ended the continuation of their branch by destroying them. What is interesting is that those people in particular were so lost to God that God did not see into their hearts. Instead, based on the accusation of others, He went to observe and judge them by their actions (10).

To affirm that Abraham above all others was worthy of God's promise, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his first son, Isaac. God did not actually want Abraham to be spiritually separated from Isaac, even for the short physical life on earth. However, He wanted Abraham to show that he loved God above all else and that he knew that all things of this world, even the human body, are expendable for the affairs of the spirit. Even if Isaac's body had been destroyed, God could have easily restored it. So at the moment of sacrifice, God stopped Abraham and was pleased. God did, however, demand that all of Abraham's male descendants be circumcised as a sign that they belonged to God. In an age when man needed physical reminders, God asked for a most personal yet harmless symbol. After Abraham, God looked after Isaac and then his son Jacob. Isaac's first son, Esau, gave up his birth right as the first son for a morsel of food. For placing the temptation of this world above the affairs of the spirit, God promised to spend generations punishing and purifying the descendants of Esau by denying them success in this world.

God, through dreams, revealed to Jacob that his children would be seeds to God's people and that through His chosen people the whole world would be saved (11). By the design of God, Jacob had

twelve sons who would become the twelve tribes of Israel, God's name for Jacob. Through a series of events God used Joseph to lead the other eleven sons of Jacob to the land of Egypt. There, they prospered under a foreign king and grew to fill the land.

These are the generations after the flood (12).

GENERATION	AGE HAVING FIRST SON	AGE AT DEATH
Shem	100	600
Arpachshad	35	438
Shelah	30	433
Eber	34	464
Peleg	30	239
Reu	32	239
Serug	30	230
Nahor	29	148
Terah	70	205
Abram	100	175
Isaac	40	
Jacob	Twelve sons to be the Tribes of Israel	

If the great flood occurred around 4400 BC, then Jacob's sons must have settled in Egypt around 3900 BC, when Egypt was but a small kingdom and not yet an empire. While this may be a contradiction to current assumptions, there are some indicators for the dating of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt. First, the Bible tells of wars occurring in the period of Abraham on the scale of hundreds and thousands of people. This is consistent with a world a few hundred years after the flood with people living for 200 to 300 years. By 2000 BC, the kingdoms of the world would be fielding armies in the tens of thousands. The Bible also tells of how Joseph rose to become the governor of Egypt and his people were given the best land of Goshen. By 2000 BC, Egypt was a major empire in its eleventh dynasty. A foreigner such as Joseph would have required greater help from God to overcome the pharaoh's racism. The land of Goshen would have been heavily populated by Egyptians if Joseph had arrived around 2000 BC.

Thus, Goshen might not have been easy to occupy and control by Jacob's family. Finally, if Joseph was governor in a well-established Egyptian dynasty, then he probably would not have been easily forgotten in a few hundred years. The record of his saving Egypt probably would have lasted.

If Jacob's family had arrived in Egypt around 3900 BC, then their descendants would have spent about 2000 years living in Egypt as free men. In that time, the Jewish population would have grown to several hundred thousand, and the memories of God and their ancestors might have been mostly forgotten. Surely, the actual population could have been much larger. However, it is to be expected that many Jews became a part of the Egyptian people through intermarriage while some Jews left Egypt to live in other lands. For the Jews who retained their nationality as the children of Jacob, the pharaoh of Egypt eventually placed them into slavery as God permitted. In slavery they continued to grow. After 450 years of slavery, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and sent His servant Moses to free the Jews. Today's historians have dated this event to about 1450 BC. History appears to confirm the Jews' arrival in the promised land and other events in the Bible.

In a parable by Jesus, we were told that God, as the owner of the vineyard, checks on the vineyard every year. As we examine the vineyard of man's development, perhaps God came to check on man in the time of Noah around 4400 BC. He spent time guiding Noah's descendants until His chosen people were planted around 3900 BC. Then, perhaps God permitted 2000 years of self-growth for His chosen people as He did with the people of ancient times. God then returned again to check on His people close to 1900 BC. The result is that He permitted His people to be placed into slavery for 400 years as the first step in purifying them to become His instrument for revealing His truth to the world. We have described this period between Noah and the enslavement of the Jews as the first true age of man. Between 4000 to 2000 BC, mankind was like a lion, untamed and wild, yet noble in spirit. The people spread across the world and took control of what God had given them. They grew strong and became the kings of this earth.

We conclude this section by discussing the wondrous ways of God. Because the universe and the events that happen from the beginning to the end of time is by the will of God and not by random, God placed signs and patterns in everything. What this means on one level is that certain numbers are of great significance to God, so He made the universe to reflect these numbers. The first number of significance is three, for it represents the Trinity, the union of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. When God created Earth, He made it the third planet. In fact, even the planets reflect in a way the relationship of man and God. Earth reflects the tree of humanity that revolves around the Sun which reflects God. Then the moon reflects Jesus which revolves around humanity, giving it light in times of darkness. Based on this idea, God may have written the entire course of human history into the stars. However, astrologers seek the stars for truth and forget that Almighty God made them so. After the great flood, God chose the three sons of Noah to begin the branches of humanity. Later, it was revealed that at the age of thirty, males are mature enough to serve in God's tent. Jesus began His work at thirty years of age. The next holy number is twelve, which is the number of archangels that originally stood before God, and thus it is a number for holy beginning. God chose twelve sons for Jacob to start the nation of Israel. God limited the life span of man to 120 years. God chose twelve apostles for Jesus to start the Body of Christ. If twelve is a holy beginning, then seven must be the number for holy completion, for it is the number of archangels that remained with God. God rested on the seventh day and commanded man to rest every seven days also. If seven is the number for holy completion, then six must be the number for God's completion with this world. God created the universe in six days. 600,000 men came out of Egypt to be the nation of Israel. There are 66 books in the Holy Bible. When God permits the beast of Satan to rip apart the world, it shall be carrying the mark of 666. The physical number of man is six, and thus the carbon atom which God used to create man has the atomic number of six. If we reduce the number for holy completion (seven) by the Trinity (three), then we have the number for holy trial, which is four. Four rivers flowed from Eden into the world of man. God

sent the great flood that lasted for forty days. The Jews were enslaved for 400 years. Satan tempted Jesus for forty days. The Jews were sent into the wasteland for forty years. Moses was tested by God in the desert for forty years. Perhaps God even designed nature with four seasons to reflect the testing in this world. Then there are four gospels, which launched man on the hardest journey of the spirit.

The one number that is against God's goodness is five, for it is the number of archangels that broke away from God. The pentagram, which is a symbol of magic, power not from God, shows five points interconnected. Five may be the number that is granted to the Dark One.

SECTION III.2: THE GROWTH OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

God's plan is of infinite complexity and works everywhere in the world simultaneously. When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt and could not travel, God allowed the people of Canaan to pull themselves out of sin. However, as God knew, the people descended well beyond the point of any possible spiritual growth. Thus, the land was available to be given to the Jews as God promised Abraham. Around 1450 BC, God selected Moses and guided his life in preparation for the salvation of His people. At the age of eighty, after forty years of education and forty years of purification, God called upon Moses and his brother Aaron (1). Because of man's maturing spirit, God revealed to us then that He shall be called "I AM." This is indeed the perfect name for God, because no word of man can define God. Any other name would limit God. Even if we say that God is everything, it would be binding, for God is far beyond what we know as everything. To Moses, God showed His form, but the full goodness of God was too much for Moses to embrace. From that point God took control of His people for the whole world to witness. To Moses and his people, God must have been the God of the moment. When Moses needed to be pushed, God pushed him. God even tried to kill Moses in an act to push him and his non-Jewish wife to obey His covenant with Abraham (2). For his mission Moses needed the support of his wife, his other half by design of God. By controlling the physical world, God caused the pharaoh of Egypt to oppose Moses' effort to free the people of God. God then used the pharaoh's stubbornness to show the world that He is the only true God.

Upon the land of Egypt, the greatest empire on earth at that time, God sent disaster after disaster until the pharaoh released the Hebrew slaves with all the treasures they could carry (3). God turned rivers into blood. He covered the land with frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts.

He caused the death of animals, boils on the people, and hail and darkness to fall on the land. God even killed the first-born sons of Egypt and at the same time made the first sons of the Israelites His. When the Hebrews left, God hardened the pharaoh again to give pursuit. Then God rescued His people by parting the Red Sea and destroying the chariots of the pharaoh in it. The Lord did all these things through Moses. In this manner, the great land of Egypt was humbled in the presence of God.

In the desert, the Lord was with His people day and night. His presence was revealed by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. Guided by God, the Israelites were victorious against all the enemies they faced. At Mount Sinai, God made the great Covenant with His people. He declared that the whole world is His, He places all the nations, and the Hebrews are specifically dedicated to Him (4). The Lord promised that as long as His people obeyed the Covenant, He would be with them and protect them. This Covenant was given in the form of Ten Commandments, which revealed the meaning of God's plan, as well as a series of laws that governed specific behavior, because the people could not fully understand the overarching Commandments and because the people needed further molding.

Despite what they had seen, the people of God were like children, always complaining and always losing faith. When Moses was called to Mount Sinai for forty days, the people quickly turned away from the true God, whose goodness they could not grasp, to meaningless yet physically tangible idols to hide their fears (5). Fear, as we have said, is a great danger even to the strongest of Christians today. Therefore in the desert, God punished them as children.

As the Hebrews approached Canaan, their arrogance overtook them and they acted in disobedience to God. For that, God sent them back into the desert for forty more years to increase their understanding of Him. In the desert, the people depended completely on God for food and protection. There God taught them through Moses the way to live as the people of God. God worked slowly to shape their spirits towards goodness by shaping their behavior. By design of God, those who were over twenty years of

age (except for Joshua and Caleb) died before the Hebrews entered into their promised land, because they had been corrupted by the world they left and must therefore cling tightly to God till death to increase their chance of salvation. This implies that until a man reaches twenty years of age, he still possesses a relatively pure spirit that has not been enslaved by this world.

At this point, we must discuss what the Hebrews learned in the desert. As we look upon the laws given to them, we must view those laws with Christian understanding. The laws that shall stand for all times are the Ten Commandments of God. While Christians and all others may not be able to meet these commandments, their truth must be proclaimed.

THE LORD COMMANDED (6)

- I. *Worship no god but Me.*
- II. *Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate Me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generations. But I show My love to thousands of generations of those who love Me and obey My laws.*
- III. *Do not use My name for evil purposes, for I, the Lord your God will punish anyone who misuses My name.*
- IV. *Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to Me. On that day no one is to work - neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.*

- V. *Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.*
- VI. *Do not commit murder.*
- VII. *Do not commit adultery.*
- VIII. *Do not steal.*
- IX. *Do not accuse anyone falsely.*
- X. *Do not desire another man s house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns.*

As a Christian looks upon the Ten Commandments, he should see that the first three commandments teach the people how to truly love God. First, we have to recognize that there is but one true God. Then, we must realize that all the beings in heaven, on earth, and even in the underworld serve Him. For us to worship them is an insult to God. Ignorant man creates idols and disposes fears and worries through them. God is the only One who can take care of us. He cannot accept our hearts wandering away from Him even in fear. When our spirits pull away from the Lord, He will mold us and our descendants through punishments to purify our spirits. When we love Him, He will nurture this spiritual quality for generations. Finally, God is goodness, and therefore to love Him is to never associate His name with evil.

As Christians look upon the last seven commandments, we should realize that they are meant to shape our lives so that we can better love God and one another. First, the Lord has given us one day out of seven to free ourselves from the temptation and enslavement of this world. We are to use this seventh day to grow our spirits closer to God and to one another. We must respect our parents, for they reflect God our Father in Heaven. Our parents are the branches of humanity from which we grew. From this law that addresses some of the closest spiritual beings to us, God told us that we must never

end another person's life on earth against God's will, for that is murder. From the vast sea of humanity, God has prepared spouses for us. Depending on God's plan, our spouses may awaken our capacity to love everyone, or test the strength of our love. No matter what, we must never betray the bond of marriage, or take part in someone else's act of betrayal. If we can betray what is easy and in front of us, then we can betray our faith in God, which is difficult and must stretch out to Him in Heaven. Sometimes the Lord uses material possessions to test and strengthen us. It is evil that pushes us to steal from others and enslaves us to this material world, pulling us away from God. It is love and respect for others that free us from the desire to steal. Before we can grow to love our fellow man, we must first learn to never harm him unjustly. God is justice and does not tolerate injustice. We are unjust if we accuse others falsely. The final commandment completes the process of the Lord's molding. By first defeating the great evils that rule us, we can at last proceed to directly shape the spirit. The last commandment does not govern the body, but the spiritual will. By freeing ourselves of worldly desires for what belongs to other men, we open our hearts and spirits to truly love others. In short, we cannot love if we let jealousy, greed, and lust enslave us.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, which God directly carved on tablets for His people, God also presented through Moses a large body of laws to help guide their behavior. As Christians, we must recognize that the Lord changes demands upon us, depending on our level of spiritual maturity. A clear example of this is what we can and cannot eat. In ancient times, men were not permitted to eat animals. Then with Noah, the Lord permitted them to eat animals, excluding the blood. With God's chosen people, He placed unique limitations on what they could eat to specifically shape their behavior. The Lord proclaimed this and many other practices to be clean or unclean. For His people, He commanded that only mammals with split hooves that chew or cud their food could be eaten, such as cows, deers, or sheep, but not pigs (7). Further, fish and select birds could be eaten. The animals that could be eaten are peaceful and docile. On the other hand, the animals that retained their wild

behavior such as pigs and all predators were banned. Indeed, God further shaped man through eating habits by not permitting His people to eat things killed by wild animals or that have died naturally. The act of eating all these would have reduced the spiritual purity of the people at that time. As Christians, we know that no food, except those dedicated to idols, can make us impure, for the spirit of Christians cannot be influenced by such things.

Because man is weak and full of worldly desires, God molded His people gently with standards within their reach. This is clear in the case of sexual practices. As Christians, we know that God created man and woman, one for one, so that a relationship of everlasting love can be formed, transcending the physical. Also, by becoming slaves to physical desires, we weaken our relationship of the spirit. This ideal was beyond the attainability of the people in the days of Moses as well as many people today. Therefore, God gave them simple straightforward laws. God prohibited sexual relationship with family members, even those not of blood relations, for that weakens or destroys the existing spiritual relationship (8). Furthermore, the Lord revealed that He hates sexual acts between men (9). Man is made to reflect God and the spiritual beings in Heaven. The body of man is the precious possession that God has given him. Therefore, for one man to hunger for the body that belongs to another man is a clear offense to God and the spiritual bonds that He is trying to build between them. God permits man to have desires for woman because woman and man are meant to be one with their bodies belonging to each other. Some men are tested with incorrect desires that they must overcome, for the tenth commandment states that one shall not desire what belongs to another man. The Lord also commanded both man and woman to never have sex with animals, for that is a perversion of God's design, and it lowers the spirit through actions at the level of animals (10). For the violation of the above laws, the punishment was often death by stoning. In the times of Moses, God applied harsh punishments to a people that would only respond to harsh punishments. Yet, because the branches stemmed from firmer foundations, God proclaimed that He would only punish a few generations instead of

unending generations. To further shape man through actions, God instructed His people to not have sex during a woman's period (11) or in the same day a man has achieved orgasm (12). The act of sex during a period may drive people towards animalism and decrease spiritual purity. Also, if there are no limits placed on man, he may become obsessed with sex all through the day. This, too, would make him a slave to this world. As with foods, Christians are given the understanding and continuous guidance through the Holy Spirit as to what will enslave us. Thus, we are not bound by laws but seek to purify our spirits willingly.

Christians might find that the Hebrew laws on sexual practices were not really restrictive. Yet, compared to what the world was like at that time, it was a great leap forward. While premarital sex was not prohibited, a man who seduced a virgin must offer marriage. With the Lord's permission, women were still placed in a position ruled by men. The legacy of Eve's spiritual impurity truly takes generations upon generations to purify. Thus, if a man raped a single unattached woman, the law of God's people only demanded that he married her (13). On the other hand, if a woman belonged to a man, or was engaged, then she was obligated to cry out for help as long as others could hear her, or she would suffer the same punishment of death as the rapist (14). In such a world where the bond of marriage was encouraged, men were allowed to marry many women and had the right to divorce a woman based on his dissatisfaction (15). With such laxness, a man had no excuse not to marry a woman he desired unless such desire was based on lust alone.: In such a case, the spirit of the child emerging from such a loveless union might be tainted and in need of special attention. Therefore, God commanded that all illegitimate children be cast out from His people and into the world where He would shape them (16). Today, because of thousands of years of God's work and Jesus' sacrifice, Christians know that all spirits emerge from generations of selection and shaping by God, ready to receive Christ. Therefore, there can no longer be any simple criteria for separating people. Instead, the choice of who is to receive the Word belongs totally to God. Even in the days of Moses, God was not always about punishment. As a sign of encouragement, God proclaimed that newly married men were not to be drafted

for the military or public service for one year in order for their love to grow (17).

The Bible does not give specific laws on prostitution, which the Bible recognizes as a self-degrading position. The Lord simply declared that He will not accept temple prostitutes (18). By the teaching of Jesus, man learned the obvious, which is that mercantilism does not belong in the house of God.

Beyond the basics of food and sex, the Lord established a series of laws to bring people closer to him. First, His people must never embrace the aspects of His creation and ignore Him. Magic is the practice of drawing and applying power in God's universe. This power may be within man's spirit, be from the dark angels, and be within God's creation. However, magic is the use of such powers without God. Magic is therefore an offense to God (19). The Bible recognizes, however, that magic does exist. For Christians, the power to control the physical world is for us to use with the permission of God through prayer. With faith, the powers that a Christian commands far exceed that of any magician. Likewise, God has written the ways of this world into the stars. Yet, if we look to the stars instead of God for understanding, it is an offense to the Lord (20). The Lord is the only One whom we must turn to - not the spirits of the dead, not the other beings of heaven, and definitely not the beings of darkness (21).

The Lord looks at the heart. That is why in the laws of His people, a man was to be given protection from revenge seekers if he killed someone by accident (22). From His people He demanded actions of justice and fairness that resist all the bias and peer pressure (23). In war, His people had to give their enemies the chance to surrender. God permitted His people to enslave their enemies so that He could work on the enemies' spirits (24). However, to all foreigners who wished to live on the land of His people in peace and respect for the Lord, the hand of welcome had to be extended by His people (25). Because the people were still young and immature, the Lord permitted slavery even among His people (26). However, because a Hebrew is someone who has accepted the Lord, he was to be kept no more than seven years (27). A master could keep a Hebrew slave for life only if the slave volunteered and proclaimed

his love for the master. As Christians, we know that to be a master in the truth of God is to love the slave enough to give him freedom. If someone chooses to be our slave, we are to love him as God loves us. God's will is for everyone to dine at His table. Therefore, a Christian master can desire nothing less. The Lord, however, never demanded this much from the masters of early days. We know that even Abraham, the root of God's people, owned slaves.

As the people of God continued to live in Canaan, the land chosen for them, they were to continue to practice the ways of God. God rested on the seventh day, and therefore the land was to be allowed to rest every seventh year (28). Every seventh year the debts of Hebrews to one another were to be forgotten. In fact, when Hebrews lent each other money, they were not to charge interest (29). Through these small steps God taught His people to overcome the temptation of money, which lessens man's desire to help each other.

The ninth commandment forbade God's people from bearing false witness against others. Focusing on the spiritual relationship between people, which is central to God's plan, this act of betrayal is just as damaging if not more damaging to the violator than any direct physical attack. When others believe a false accusation and spiritually reject an innocent man, the love in the whole community is diminished. This loss of love and trust may be more tragic than even the death of an individual. Therefore, in the case of murder trials where the rejection is permanent, God drastically reduced the situations where His people can condemn a suspect to prevent the possible accusation of innocent people. For the Lord's people, a murderer could only be punished with the testimony of two witnesses. Christians must place great emphasis on this understanding.

For centuries, men have debated over whether life begins at conception or at birth. For all people of God, Christians and Jews, we must consider life beginning at the point when the spirit is formed. This is not necessarily the beginning of physical life or mental activity. The issue is whether the fetus has an independent spirit in a mother's womb. For our consideration, in the times of Moses, if two men fighting caused a pregnant woman to lose her

baby, they were to pay her monetary demands. If the woman herself was hurt, then the punishment was an eye for an eye (30). Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit that must guide our belief as to when life begins. Whether a fetus is spiritually independent or not, the intentional killing of an unborn child is an act denying a spirit or would-be spirit its opportunity on earth. In many ways this is a non-issue, for whether there is life or not, the decision to stop this path of life should be too great for anyone to make without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

While in the desert for forty years, God did not demand offerings and sacrifices. However, when the people moved into Canaan and away from direct dependence on the Lord, He selected the tribe of Levi as His priests to take on the responsibility of all the first born males of His people. Then through laws the Lord guided them in order to further their relationship with Him. But because the people could not free themselves of materialism, the Lord came to require offerings. It was done to strengthen the people, and the Lord chose a percentage that was obtainable for them. Today, it takes the strongest of Christian love to give more than what God demanded of the Hebrews. God asked for offerings so that people could free themselves of the greed that ruled them. God asked for offerings so that the trust and bond between man and God would grow. If one gave the tithe, the Lord promised to return more (31). Most of the offerings, food for instance, were shared by everyone at His Holy Place after the worship (32). The offerings of every third year were to be given to the Levites who did God's work. To free man completely from the enslavement of the material world, God asked that some offerings be burned, destroyed. The aroma of such an act pleased God. Finally, God asked for sacrifices as a symbol of His people's love for Him. To the Lord, the people should be willing to give the best of their labor.

Centuries later as the people grew away from the Lord, God revealed that He has no need for such physical offerings without love and faith, for the whole world belonged to Him (33). If He wanted temples, He could command a thousand to rise. Instead, for years He chose to live with His people in a tent. When it came

time to build a temple, God did not demand more offerings. Instead, His king was given the resources that were needed.

For Christians the contribution of one's wealth and energy must embody love. Christians are not required to give the tithe, as they are no longer bound by the laws of the past. Offerings to the Body of Christ can never resemble a tax with percentage requirements. However, we must remember the first Christians, who offered all their possessions to the Body and then took from it what they needed. This sharing, which was established through Old Testament laws, should continue with love. What God asks us to lose are mere things of this world with no intrinsic value. Only human life must be held sacred. Those nations that sacrificed human lives greatly offended God (34).

We conclude this section on laws by discussing the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man. God, who is omniscient, can justly decide how many generations must be punished for a parent's crime. On the other hand, man knows nothing about how one person's sins affect those who are spiritually tied to him. Therefore, the laws to the Hebrews forbid man from punishing either a father or son for the crime that the other has committed.

The Rise of Israel

As the time for the Israelites drew near, several events teach us about the ways of the Lord and the qualities He desires in us. First, as with Abraham and Isaac, God revealed to His servant Moses His intentions. When God was about to destroy Sodom, Abraham pleaded for them (35). Sodom was destroyed because not one righteous man was found in it. When the people of God betrayed Him at Mount Sinai, God proclaimed to Moses that He wanted to destroy them and build a great nation from the descendants of Moses. But Moses, like Abraham, pleaded with the Lord for the people (36). Convinced that He should not destroy His people after rescuing them from Egypt for the sake of all the rest of the world who were watching, the Lord allowed His people to live. In viewing this event, we must not forget that the all-knowing and almighty God must, when interacting with man, be a God of the moment, within man's time frame and level of understanding. Being a God

of the moment, He had to show His intent so that His people would have a chance to be afraid and change. He had to show His intent so that His closest servants could express their great love for the people. Yet, He knew that He would change His mind. As the stories are passed down, the people will then know that when God expresses His disapproval, it is not too late. The Lord is especially responsive to the repentance of people. He is patience, and He is love (37). However, He must at times trim the branches of humanity so that others will grow stronger. In a time when the people were like children, He kept them away from evil with a demand of strict obedience.

As the Hebrews approached Canaan, God also warned a prophet of the opposing people, Balaam, about what He was about to do (38). Even from the times of Moses, we see that the God of the Hebrews is the God of all the world and all the nations. He will speak to other religions and people. However, Balaam and his people were nevertheless destroyed by the Israelites. Christians should not argue over how God guides other nations or people. The important difference is that Christians belong to the Lord as His friends and the Jews belong to the Lord only as His servants. The rest of the world and the universe belong to the Lord as His slaves. In His time, the Lord guides His slaves to become His willing servants, His friends, and His children.

Even in the times of Moses, there was a problem with people being burdened by their past sins after they had repented. This is because the people cannot see that God permits all the actions of sin so that people can rise above evil. Once people have spiritually turned towards good, their past actions are meaningless and should not bother them. Yet, if they cannot break away from caring about the material world, the tormenting guilt would in itself hinder their spiritual advancement. God does not want guilt but change. Therefore, for God's people Moses performed an act that cast the sins of the 'people onto a scapegoat which took it away (39). Like children, the people felt an animal had taken their guilt away and went on to live in purity. For Christians, Jesus became the instrument for taking away our past sins. Through His death on the cross, Christians still

struggling with their faith felt that Jesus took the punishment that was meant for them. Yet, hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the prophets had already revealed that the Lord will forgive all who turn away from evil toward goodness. Such forgiveness does not demand the sacrifice of Jesus, but the goodness that is required is too great for most to achieve. The right to punish belongs to the Lord, yet all He wants is for us to love Him truly and love one another. In life, the Lord punishes those whom He loves, to shape and mold them. In death, the Lord casts out all those who rejected Him or were too tainted by evil. Jesus' dying on the cross cannot free a spirit from the grasp of evil. However, a spirit realizing that Jesus died for him can free himself from evil by embracing the new relationship with the Lord. At that moment, what do his past sins matter?

At the gateway to Canaan, God commanded Moses not to enter because of one specific sin. At Kadesh when the people were once again complaining to Moses about thirst, Moses, at the Lord's command, brought forth water from solid rock. However, Moses sinned when he said to the people, "Listen, you rebels! Do we have to get water out of this rock for you?" (40) In this manner he denied that all power came from the Lord. Moses, however, did not say this in arrogance. Through the Bible we have come to know Moses as a very humble and dedicated man. Moses' great weakness had always been self-insecurity. When the Lord first called upon him, he felt incapable and unworthy of performing the great task the Lord asked of him. After so much work, Moses at Kadesh still felt insecure as the leader of the Israelites, especially when they opposed him. Thus, he used the power of God to boost his authority, because for one brief moment Moses forgot how much God loved him and would never abandon him to the immature mobs. The Bible reveals that the Lord so loved Moses that they spoke as friends and that the Lord showed him the entire process of creation. The Lord's final punishment of Moses, which was for him never to step foot into Canaan, is a trivial matter that only pertains to this world. However, it served to help Moses cling tighter to God so that God could accept him into Heaven. Many of God's prophets, despite their service, must rest in the World of the Dead until the gift of Jesus. Yet we know that Moses and the prophet Elijah stand besides Jesus today (41).

As the Lord sent the nation of Israel into the land that He promised them, He knew that prosperity would bring corruption. Yet His people must be allowed to rise above this corruption. To strengthen them, the Lord demanded obedience. It was revealed that God looks at the heart and demands from the heart instead of physical acts of offering. The land of Canaan was full of those branches of humanity that, after centuries of testing, must be trimmed. To man, all people may seem similar in their spiritual quality and capacity to sin. Only the Lord knows how much guidance each group of people has received from the Lord and how poorly they have failed. We do know that the command of the Lord was for the Israelites to destroy everything in Canaan: property, men, women, and children. Nothing was to remain to corrupt the Israelites (42).

One may wonder why God would ask His people to conduct so much killing. The act of killing another human being, especially a child, would harm the spirit of the killer only if the spirit is already pure or mature enough to be affected by it. The people of Israel were not yet ready to understand the ways of the spirit and the ways of loving one another. They were most often ruled by their self-interests. When they feared, they rebelled against God. When they prospered, they forgot about God. In the Bible, there are no cases where the people felt great sadness for killing the Canaanites and for ending their chance to be further tested on earth. No one pleaded for the Canaanites as Abraham did for Sodom. Instead, there was only a case of an Israelite stealing a robe (43). The Lord commanded that he and his family be also killed. Through these acts of killing the people came to fear the Lord first hand. Through obedience the Lord worked on the other qualities of the human spirit. With the truth of Jesus, God no longer asked for people to kill others. Instead, we are expected to pray for all whom the Lord is about to directly destroy.

It was said before that God will change His mind if the people change. This was indeed true with one of the Canaanite groups. Fearing the God of Israel, the Gibeonites tricked and surrendered themselves to the Israelites to become their slaves (44). For this act of humility and wisdom, God spared their lives. On the other

hand, the other kingdoms of Canaan grew stubborn and attacked the Israelites, knowing what the Lord did to bring them out of Egypt. In defeating the most powerful kingdom on earth at the time, the Lord showed all surrounding nations that He is the true God. In taking Canaan, God commanded His people to work together. While all from one family, the tribes of Israel were often divided. When one tribe acquired their land, the willingness to help other tribes might have diminished. Therefore, the Lord commanded that those who have already acquired their land must help the other tribes until all the land was conquered. At the time the Israelites were under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' young assistant. The Lord was with them, and they were completely victorious. In accordance with the Lord's instruction, the army was built of men dedicated to the Lord and not afraid to die. Those who were afraid were sent home.

While the Israelites lived in their land, the Lord left enemies around them to shape them (45). These enemies, such as the Philistines, assiduously tempted the Israelites to lure them away from God. When the Israelites could not resist and started to worship foreign gods, the Lord would allow their enemies to defeat and rule over them. Then the Lord would send a prophet and leader to rescue them and show them their true God. Each of these prophet leaders, who were called judges, was filled with the Spirit of God. Christians know this as the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit these judges were often given great powers like that of Samson. Altogether twelve judges were sent to start the nation of Israel. They were: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson. To show that true strength is from Him, God often chose His leaders from the smallest tribes and the most obscure families in Israel.

Four hundred years after leaving the land of Egypt, the Israelites entered the next stage of their national path. In preparation, God selected the prophet Samuel, knowing that the people of Israel would come to Samuel to demand a king to rule them (46). Until then, God was the King of Israel, whose commands passed to the people through the prophets (47). However, the ways of God were beyond the people who became enslaved to the world.

Therefore, they wanted a ruler of flesh and blood, a ruler with whom they could identify. The Lord warned His people that such a ruler would not only send their children off to war to fill his treasuries but also enslave them for his personal gains. The people of Israel thought nothing of the warning and willingly placed themselves under the rule of earthly masters.

Guided by the Lord, Samuel selected Saul from the least important family of the smallest tribe of Benjamin to be the first king of Israel. As the Spirit of the Lord consumed Saul, he rose to power and was victorious against the enemies of Israel. Then the Lord tested Saul by commanding Him to completely destroy the wicked people of Amalek. Upon victory over the Amalekites, Saul and his men fell into temptation and decided to keep the best livestock and treasures of the Amalekites. Saul also spared the life of the Amalekite king, perhaps because of a sense of fellowship (48). Saul knew that the Lord wanted obedience, but he tried to wash away his sin with the tainted animals. With this offense, the Lord turned away and the Spirit of the Lord left him. This shows that an offering is a gift of love, not a bribe to cancel out sins.

Guided by the Lord, Samuel then selected David, a shepherd and the youngest son in the house of Jesse. The Lord looked into the hearts of men to find the young David. As Samuel anointed David, the Spirit of the Lord immediately entered him. Then the Lord guided the course of David's life until he finally became king. As David ascended, Saul became more corrupted. So the Lord gave permission for an evil spirit to influence him and mislead him to his destruction. In his last days, Saul even used a medium to call the resting spirit of Samuel from the World of the Dead (49). Thus, we know that evil powers do exist in this world.

When the Lord selected prophets, He kept them pure by denying them the temptations of this world. However, with kings the Lord had to abandon them to all the temptations of the world. David, like other kings, had many wives and concubines. David, like other kings, was interested in power and wealth. However, David was a king who never turned away from the Lord. Thus, the Lord gave David victory over enemies. Yet, because David had shed so much blood in war, he was found unfit to build the Lord's temple (50).

No matter how good the intent, killing our fellow man could still be a sign of spiritual weakness. The Lord would not demand His people to kill if their spiritual purity was above killing. As David dealt with the worldly matters of God's people he fell in love with Basheba, the wife of another man, and committed adultery. The Lord permitted a child to be conceived so that David would further fall into temptation, causing him to send Basheba's husband to his death. The Lord permitted Basheba's husband to die, because he disobeyed a direct order by his king, David, to make love to his wife (51).

When the prophet Nathan, guided by the Lord, accused David of his grave sin, the king repented before the Lord. The Lord forgave David's sins and permitted him to continue as king. Yet, the Lord did not allow the child of such adultery to survive. Christians know that all children are acceptable in the eyes of the Lord. If a child definitely does not have the spiritual quality to benefit from the testing of this world, perhaps the Lord might take him early in life. Because David truly loved Basheba, the Lord permitted them to marry. From such deep love, the next king of Israel, Solomon, was born (52). The earlier marriages of David were often political arrangements as David ascended to power. Therefore, the children born of such bonds may not have had the spiritual quality to rule. In fact, David's other children gave him many problems in his later years. His son Absalom even tried to seize the kingdom of Israel by force, but was killed in the process (53).

During David's reign, he again sinned against the Lord by taking a census without permission (54). It is said that David was tempted by Satan. For this sin the Lord sent a plague to David's people, leaving many dead. God was just in punishing the people for the king's sin because the people voluntarily turned away from God as their King. A census taken by the king symbolized an enslavement and corruption of the people. As people of God, the only one they should be accountable to was God. When one did not commit a crime, why should he be accountable to the king? Typically a census led to taxation, conscription, and other laws where honest people would be treated as property of the king. Yet, to the end, David, despite his mistakes, never turned away from God. Therefore God

proclaimed that his bloodline shall rule forever. After forty years as king, David went to rest with the Lord, saved from the World of the Dead by his faithfulness (55).

During the reign of David, a soldier was killed by God when he tried to support the covenant box as it was coming into the city of Jerusalem (56). God killed Uzzah because of his irreverence and arrogance. The Israelites knew that the true God is the omnipotent God that controls everything. Therefore, when a man knew that he was not supposed to touch the covenant box, should he try to support it when he thought it might fall? If God wanted the box to fall, it would have fallen. If God did not want the box to fall, it would have floated in air. For Uzzah to think that he could support God was arrogance and a sign that he was a slave to this world.

God guided Solomon as he guided his father David. Solomon pleased the Lord especially when he prayed for the wisdom to lead God's people. Thus, God blessed him with wisdom beyond anyone in the past or future of this world. With this wisdom Solomon brought to Israel wealth beyond all other nations (57). Thus, when the time came to build God's temple, the Lord had already prepared the resources. Yet, as king of an often disobedient people, Solomon still used forced labor to do the work.

As Solomon continued his reign, he succumbed to lust and took on many foreign wives. As Eve led Adam, the foreign wives led Solomon to build temples for their gods (58). Thus Solomon, the wisest man on earth, turned away from God. As punishment, God decided that Solomon's descendants should only rule the land of Judah, which was of their home tribe. The rest of Israel would be ruled by one of Solomon's generals. Thus after three kings, the single nation of Israel was torn apart. Solomon ruled for forty years.

To the divided land the Lord sent the prophet Elijah to oppose the prophets of foreign gods. Elijah had been blessed with exceptional powers. For instance, he prayed and brought people back to life. Through miracles the people of Israel were shown that God was with Elijah. In the end Elijah was taken to Heaven without death. When Elisha asked Elijah for the inheritance of his powers, Elijah responded that if Elisha could see him being taken up, then the power would be transferred (59). This means that the gift of

seeing belongs to those with strong faith. The spirit of Elijah was taken, not necessarily the body. Jesus is the only one who was definitely received back into Heaven both in spirit and body. The early Christians saw the Holy Spirit descending. When Jesus returns in power, many may not see that His people are taken up to Him. Elisha, however, did have faith strong enough to see, thus receiving the power from God.

When the people of Israel drifted far away from God, He sent the prophet Amos to warn them of what the Lord was about to do to them. Then He sent the prophet Hosea to proclaim His love even for a people who were faithless. Yet, the people of Israel would not turn to the Lord. Around 725 BC, the Lord made the king of Assyria attack Israel. The Kingdom of Israel broke apart and many Israelites were taken to Assyria. At the same time, God permitted the Kingdom of Judah to endure the attack while sending the prophets Isaiah and Micah to warn them. For a period of time the people of Judah changed their ways. However, in the course of the next hundred years the people again drifted away from God. The Lord sent more prophets to warn and to guide them. The prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah were sent. Like the people of Israel, Judah would not turn to God. Around 600 BC, the Lord sent the king of Babylon to defeat Judah and allowed the best of Judah to be taken away to Babylon. There, humbled as servants without land and power, the captives would again be purified. Before this time the Lord also sent Jonah to the Assyrian city of Nineveh to declare that God would destroy them. This warning immediately made the people humble themselves before God. God then showed the world that He will change His mind when people heed His warning.

While the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, the Lord sent Ezekiel to inspire them and Daniel to show the king of Babylon the power of the true God. The Lord also sent the prophets Obadiah and Zechariah to guide the people who were still in Judah. After about seventy years in captivity, the Lord made Persia rise and take over Babylon, and the Hebrews were allowed to return to their land. This return occurred in several waves and was completed by 440 BC. In the land of Judah, the temple was rebuilt and the people

renewed their faith. The Lord then sent the prophets Haggai, Joel, and Malachi to further encourage and warn the people on their return. By 400 BC, the people of Israel were left to their rulers until the coming of the Messiah.

Through these prophets the Lord gave all the people, Jews and Christians alike, an understanding of the events to come. God also revealed a much deeper understanding of His ways and plans. For Christians, the coming of Jesus was revealed in their words. All these things will be discussed in the next section.

As our discussion approaches the end of this second phase of man's development, one very special subject, the appearance of the Angel of the Lord several times in the early days, needs to be addressed. Let us turn to examples. The Angel of the Lord came to Haggai, the slave of Abraham, and revealed that He would make her descendants numerous (60). The Angel of the Lord came to Abraham and made a vow by His own name that He would make Abraham prosperous (61). When Moses was in the desert, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him from a flaming bush and God spoke through His Angel (62). During the period of the Judges, the Angel of the Lord proclaimed that He took the people out of Egypt (63). Finally, the Angel guided the parents of Samson. When they asked the Angel for His name so that they could worship Him, the Angel questioned their motivation. Then He proclaimed that His name is a name of wonders (64). These events showed that the Angel of the Lord was one with the Lord. He was given full authority to guide God's people. For Christians the Angel of the Lord must be Jesus Christ who had been with God since the beginning. Truly, Jesus came to His people in physical form and they did not know Him. Yet both Old and New Testaments belong to Him. The glory of the Old Testament was given to God, for no one truly knew the Son except for the Father.

On the side of evil, Satan too had been with God for a very long time. He reported to God in the days before Jesus' birth along with all the angels (65). However, he has always worked to tempt man and even tried to deceive God. Yet, it is God who knows and controls all things. He allowed Satan's games to cause Him to test Job. Then through such a testing He showed the world the righteousness

of Job. In the end, Job was given everything that God had taken away and more. God also honored his name to last in the Bible. Through Job, God taught us that while His ways are not always easy to comprehend, the result will always be perfect for those on the side of goodness.

This second period of man, stretching from the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt to the coming of Jesus, reveals a humanity that spread across the earth as strong as a bull. Like a bull, man was stubborn and headstrong. Even the people of God were like stubborn animals that always stormed away from God.

SECTION III.3:

THE DESTINY OF MAN

With the birth of Jesus, mankind entered into its third phase of development. In the first age of man, he charged forward like a lion and took control of the earth. In the second age of man, he stubbornly charged onward without recognition of God. Now with the third age, God sent His Son to end man's stubborn ignorance and awaken a human spirit that belongs to the Lord. As the gospels show, God sent a wave of prophets in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Through the prophets the coming of the King was foretold, the fate of the Israelites was pronounced, the ways of God were touched upon, the future events of the world were drawn, and the completion of God's plan was revealed. All this knowledge was given to the chosen people of God over 400 years before the birth of Jesus.

After the completion of Jesus' work as a man, the apostles and disciples continued to capture the heart of Christianity in their writings. Many have debated the origins and authenticity of the works in the Bible, and indeed one must judge every piece of writing based on the truth it contains. If prophecies do not come true, then they cannot be by God's will (1). God does not deceive His people. Christians might then ask whether the Lord would permit the Bible to contain false information. The Holy Bible ends with a prophecy more detailed than any prophecy in the Old Testament. All the prophecies of the Bible are not like the words of charlatans, which are vague and open to many interpretations. The point is that there is but one truth. For centuries, Christians have been trying to understand the truth by fitting the events of the world into the prophecies of the Bible. Unlike the vague and ambiguous words of charlatans, the words of the Bible are troubling because they are so specific but rather hard to interpret. After all, the Bible must fit the reality like a pair of gloves. To deal with this problem, many have selected pieces of the prophecies and used them in spreading the Word. Others have tried to push all the prophecies out into the distant future, far beyond

their concern. The Jews did this with the prophecies about the Messiah. After having witnessed the mistake of the Jews, one must clearly see the dangers of ignoring prophecies because nothing seems to fit. At the same time, Christians are warned repeatedly to test false prophets and interpreters, for everything they say must fit the Bible and everything in the Bible must fit into what they say.

This disciple is aware of the dangers, but he cannot ignore the events that will unfold as foretold in the Bible. Christians know that there is a completion to God's plan and that the time of completion is near. After thousands of years of man's growth on this earth, what remains is to spread the truth of God to the far comers of the world as Jesus has commanded. Since the completion of the Bible in the first century and the compilation of the Bible in the third century, Christians have been left to this task in a world given to Satan with only the Holy Spirit to empower them. Now as humanity has reached the end of the second millennia of this effort, we find the Bible translated into over 1000 languages and Christian missionaries searching out lost souls in every region of the world. All Christians must ask themselves whether their work is nearing completion. Based on the rough time span of the previous ages of man, one also must ask whether this age where many men stood up and embraced the Word is nearing completion.

While this disciple cannot answer the questions about the future, for only God knows when the end will come (2), he can endeavor to compile and briefly summarize what the prophets and Jesus have said. After this short compilation, which is far from thorough, some possibilities may form based upon historical and current events. These possibilities are presented for everyone to share, explore, criticize, and build upon in fellowship.

We begin this discussion with the things closest to our hearts and move toward controversial subjects. Nearly 2000 years after the birth of Jesus, Christians still seek to understand how God prepared the world for the coming of the savior through the prophets. We have already discussed the truth that Jesus brought to the world. Now as we discuss the beginning of the age of man, we must start by looking back to see how pieces of this truth had already been

passed to the Jews. Then in the words of Hebrew prophets, the fate of the Israelites will be studied. The last three areas are wrapped in controversy: the image of God, the events before the end, and the end of the world.

Visions Related To Jesus

Micah: A ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem. He will bring peace and all people will acknowledge Him. Before then the people will return from Assyria but the earth will be a desert because of the wickedness.

Zechariah: The King will come humbling Himself and riding on a donkey.

Ezekiel: One day the Lord will punish each person for his sins and not for the sins of his father. The Lord will offer the forgiveness of sins and He will be the shepherd who finds all the lost sheep. He will separate the good and the bad, the sheep from the goats. The Lord hates those who take more than they need. God promises that one day a king like David will rule, and the Lord will breathe life into the dead to bring them back to their land. A New Covenant will be made with His people.

Isaiah: With the coming of Immanuel after the fall of Assyria and Babylon, the land will once again prosper. They will call Him, "Wonderful Counselor," "Prince of Peace," "Mighty God," "Eternal Father." He will rule the earth until the end of time. There will be a New Covenant for the new things to come. God's King will be sacrificed so that God can forgive.

Jeremiah: One day God will make a New Covenant and He will put His laws in people's hearts. He will forgive the sins and forget the wrongs.

Daniel: A man in white linen cloth appears in Daniel's vision and says that He fights against the guardian angels of Persia and

Greece with only the angel Michael to protect Him. He then reveals the Book of Truth. Daniel is told by the angel Gabriel that it will be seven times seventy years between the beginning of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of God's chosen leader. The rebuilt Jerusalem will stand for seven times 62 years in troubled times until God's chosen leader comes and is killed unjustly.

Revelation: A man with seven stars in His hand, wearing a robe stretching to His feet and a gold band around His chest. His hair is pure white, His eyes are like blazing fire, and His feet are like polished bronze. He is the first and the last, the One that was dead but lives forever, and the One that has authority over death. At His birth, Satan is portrayed as a dragon who fought against Him and was cast out of Heaven with one third of the angels. Satan on earth pursued the woman that gave birth to Him. The woman's dress is the sun. Her foot is on the moon. A crown of twelve stars is on her head. God protects the woman for 3 1/2 years, and then the dragon fights against her descendants who are of God's people.

Long before the birth of Jesus, the prophets had already been given very specific knowledge of the time of His coming and the work that He must do. According to prophecies, Jesus would be born around 490 years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This chosen leader of God would humble Himself and sacrifice Himself so that God could forgive. He would be killed unjustly. For anyone who believed in the prophets, their words have indeed come true. Some prophets saw in their visions a man in linen doing work such as protecting the people of Israel or saving the worthy. Christians should consider the possibility that this man in the visions of the prophets is Jesus, for we know that Jesus has been working to save mankind since the beginning of creation. One must also recognize that the visions of Heaven are not through the eyes but by the spirit. The spirit sees not the physical form, which is static, but the meaning. Thus, the vision of Jesus could also be that of a powerful heavenly being with fiery eyes who is holding stars, representing

the archangels who serve Him. The woman who gave birth to Jesus, as she is described, may symbolize the true branches of humanity, for it is humanity that is dressed by the sun with twelve archangels who once looked after it. As foretold, Satan took one third of the angels in Heaven, including four of the twelve archangels. Since Satan was one of the archangels, only seven would remain, led by Michael, to protect humanity. The period of 3 1/2 could represent a time frame when Satan was prevented from corrupting mankind. In this period, the Body of Christ took root on solid ground. If the pure part of humanity was the woman in Revelation, then Rome was the desert where God led her for protection. Satan struck at her in the desert but God protected her. Interestingly as foretold, 350 years after the rise of Christianity in Rome, Rome broke apart and Satan was given permission to tempt man. The growth and purity of the Body of Christ became a constant struggle from hence.

The Ways of God

Amos: God takes care of all nations and God will change His mind if the people listen and obey. The Lord does not need sacrifices and offerings. He did not ask for anything when His people were in the desert. The Lord controls all things and every disaster that hits a city is sent by the Lord.

Hosea: The Lord demands constant love.

Micah: God is justice and constant love.

Habakuk: Wealth is deceitful.

Ezekiel: The spirit of God enters into His prophets. God proclaims that people are responsible for their fellow man. If one has the power to save others from sin, he must do it. The Lord will mislead all false prophets. Test a true prophet, for they will always be true. God frowns on Babylon for being a nation of businessmen, and the World of the Dead is for the ungodly. If an evil man stops sinning and does good, then he will not die.

His sins are forgiven. However, if a good man turns evil, then none of the good he did can save him.

Jonah: The Lord will change His mind on punishment when the people repent. This is especially true when His punishment denies children their time on earth for the wickedness of their parents.

Isaiah: The plans God makes are wise and they will always succeed. We are taught to feed the hungry and help the homeless. God lives with people who are humble and repentant. Worshiping God is about the heart and not about obeying rules.

Jeremiah: God selects His prophets before they are born. No one is the master of his own destiny, nor has control over his life. Thus, the only thing that man should boast about is how well he knows God. The Lord asked, "Who can understand the human heart? There is nothing else so deceitful." However, God is everywhere. Therefore no one can hide from Him. What God wants is for people to change, and if they do God will change His mind about their punishment.

The words of the prophets affirm what Christians have been taught. God is the master of all nations and controls or permits all events to take place. What the Lord wants is our love, and not our offerings unless they are true symbols of our love. The Holy Spirit has guided God's leaders, as shown in previous sections, since the early days. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Spirit of God is given to all who belong to Jesus. The desire of God is for man to turn away from deceit and sin, for the way of God is forgiveness. People are taught that wealth corrupts, and the way to our salvation can start with loving and helping others, especially the poor and homeless. God will seek out such people and lead them to the Word in His time. Since life is meant to purify man for God, it is only the result that counts. At the end of life, it is one's goodness as reflected through love and faith that results in salvation, no matter how far he had to come and how much wrong he did. The Lord does

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not wish to send anyone to the World of the Dead. For those who turn away from sinning, He promises that they will not die. The crux is that a purity of spirit is not obtainable by just obeying laws.

The Fate of the Israelites

Amos: God will shake the Jews among nations to remove the worthless. Then the Lord will plant them on the land He gave them, and they will not be pulled again.

Hosea: Israel is like a wife to the Lord. Yet, she appoints kings without the Lord's approval and builds more altars so that they can sin more.

Zechariah: God will make the men of Zion like a sword against Greece.

Ezekiel: God will send six men to punish Israel, and a man in linen will be sent to save the worthy. At one point, the Jews will wear sackcloth, tremble in fear, have their heads shaven, and be disgraced. God will send famine, war, wild animals, and disease onto them. God will declare them the enemy and kill good and evil alike. They will be sent to the World of the Dead to join the people of ancient times before Noah.

Obadiah: The surrounding nations of Israel will suffer a bitter fate for what they have done to God's people. The people of Jacob will destroy the people of Esau and none will survive. Southern Judah will occupy Edom. Northern Israel's army of exile will conquer from Phoenicia to Zaraphath.

Isaiah: As God's punishment, the women of Israel will have their heads shaven and be dressed in rags. Their men will be killed in wars. Many nations will help Israel return to the land and serve it. Those who once captured Israel will be captured in Israel. Israel's sins will only be forgiven when all pagan altars

are destroyed. In order that people praise God, He holds back destroying His worthless people.

Jeremiah: God will make every nation in the world horrified at what He does to the people of Israel. One day when the sky could be measured and the foundations of the earth explored, only then will God reject Israel for their crimes.

As the prophets revealed, the Jews by the seventh century were scattered to the far comers of the world with their land given to the Arabs. Until then however, the rebuilt Jerusalem stood against the empires of Greece and Persia in a time of trouble, received Jesus, and suffered Roman punishment soon after Jesus. In God's punishment of His people He will send them to the World of the Dead to join the people before Noah. Looking into recent history, God adhered to His promise to beat down the men and women of Israel. With the recent event of the Holocaust, the Lord has made all the nations horrified at what was done to the Jews. The images of women in rags with shaven heads and gas chambers showed shockingly how prophecies were fulfilled. Yet, God will not completely destroy the Jews for the sake of growing Christianity, so that immature Christians, who still place false values on this world, will not misunderstand the ways of God. He promised that one day the people of the world would bring the Israelites back to their land where they would not be uprooted, and so it was. For the nations that God used to punish His people, we must remember that God uses good and evil alike. Those who have the evilness to do such a deed of destruction will one day themselves be punished by God. God will forgive Israel only after other religions have been obliterated at the appropriate time. Then, the whole world will come to worship the one true God.

Image of God

Ezekiel: Four creatures of human form with four faces, four wings, and four hands surround a man on a throne. The faces are those of a human, lion, bull, and eagle. Spinning three dimensional

wheels travel with each of the creatures. The man is of a fiery form with the color of bronze from the waist up.

Isaiah: God comes with flaming six-winged creatures.

Revelation: God sits on His throne with a face that gleams like precious stones and a rainbow of emerald color all around. Twenty-four thrones surround God with elders in white wearing crowns on their heads. Seven spirits stand as torches before God. A sea of clear glass lies before the throne. On each side of the throne is a creature with eyes in front and back. The four creatures look like a lion, a bull, a man, and an eagle. Each one had six wings.

Daniel: God is wearing a pure white robe and has hair like wool. He sits upon a fiery throne with wheels.

Concerning the visions of God, we must recognize that they all were seen with the spiritual eye, not with physical eyes. The spirit sees the meaning, and the meaning is translated into images for the prophets to understand. Therefore, in the visions of God we must ask what the images mean, instead of treating them as physical entities of this world. As for Ezekiel, whom God called mortal man, the Lord was seen as a man of fiery form that shines with the color of bronze. His words were firm, and His anger with His people was clear. To Daniel, whom God has shown much more, He was a man in white on a fiery throne. Upon the sacrifice of Jesus, God was seen as a man emanating many sparkling colors. In fact, the appearance of jewels was often used to describe everything in Heaven. Different prophets saw God differently. This could be due to the spiritual quality of the prophets or the feeling of God at the time. It is, however, generally agreed that around God are four creatures, and these creatures reflect that of a lion, bull, man, and eagle. Ezekiel identified them as the same creatures, each possessing four faces (lion, bull, man, eagle) and four wings. John saw them as different creatures, each with one of the four same faces and with six wings. Isaiah also identified the creatures as having six wings. Based on these limited descriptions,

maybe the creatures are the same as well as different. Based on the detailed description of what is around God, we can identify the seven archangels, the human elders who may include the apostles and prophets, and Jesus as the lamb. The one entity that must also be there is the Holy Spirit. Perhaps these creatures represent the Holy Spirit, which has wings to carry the power of God to man. There are four parts of the Holy Spirit perhaps because mankind is to go through four stages of development. We have already identified when man was like the lion and the bull. As Christianity is spreading across the world, man is given a human mind. When Christ comes to be our King, perhaps mankind will enter into a fourth period of spiritual blossoming, soaring to the sky like the eagle. Ezekiel therefore tells us that the creatures are the same, while Revelation states that each creature has its mission. If we study what God presented to Ezekiel, we might conclude that it is about human testing. Thus, the Holy Spirit would come bearing the message on four wings and four hands, representing action and change. As we have discussed, four is a number of change and testing in the world. As we study what God showed to Isaiah and John, we might conclude that it is about the completion of God's plan. Therefore, the creatures would come on six wings.

Before the End

Daniel: After Babylon there will be: a lesser empire than Babylon, then an empire of bronze to rule the whole earth, then an empire of iron that shatters and crushes all the earlier empires, and lastly an empire of part iron and part clay which is a divided empire united by intermarriage. Within this period God will prepare a Kingdom of Heaven that will destroy all empires and it will last forever. On that day there will be four major kingdoms in the world: one like a lion with wings, and the wings will be ripped off so that the lion will be made to stand with a human mind; one like a bear standing upright holding three ribs in its mouth with a voice telling it to go on eating as much meat as it can; one like a leopard with four wings and four heads presenting the

look of authority; and the last one of ten horns plus claws and teeth with one small horn rising up to take down three horns. These four kingdoms will have power for 3 1/2 years. Then the first three of them shall be permitted to stay without power while the fourth is destroyed.

Revelation: The lamb with seven horns and seven eyes is sacrificed and made worthy to open the scroll in the hand of God. The scroll has seven seals with each seal releasing a series of events that will occur before the end.

First Seal releases the white horse of conquest.

Second Seal releases the red horse of war and killing.

Third Seal releases the black horse of poverty and subsistence.

Fourth Seal releases the pale horse of death by war, famine, disease, and wild animals.

Fifth Seal uncovers the souls of all killed in His name. After receiving white robes, they are told to rest a while longer until their number is complete.

Sixth Seal brings the events on earth to a closure with earthquakes. The sun also turns black, the moon turns red, and stars fall to earth. The rich and the powerful shall hide in caves. Four angels are sent to hold back the winds as one angel comes from the east with God's seal to mark 144,000 people worthy to be called the servants of God. There are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Seventh Seal signals God's act of completion. The seven arch-angels blow trumpets while an angel gathers and empowers the prayers of God's people.

First Trumpet brings hail of fire with blood on the earth, destroying one-third of all the trees.

Second Trumpet brings a mountain of fire that is thrown on the sea to turn one-third of the sea into blood, destroying one-third of the ships and sea creatures.

Third Trumpet brings a falling star that turns one-third of the water bitter, causing many deaths.

Fourth Trumpet causes the sun, moon, and stars to lose one-third of their brightness. There will be no light for one-third day and one-third of the night.

Fifth Trumpet causes a star to fall and open the abyss, ruled by the angel Apollyon, to release smoke and a locust-like thing that stings like a scorpion to torture all except the 144,000 servants of God for five months.

Sixth Trumpet releases the four angels bound at the Euphrates with 200 million of their troops to kill one-third of mankind by fire, smoke, and sulfur.

At this point enters the angel with the small scroll that tastes good but goes down bitter. Seven thunders respond in secretive words as the scroll is opened to grant Satan his moment. A beast with the power, throne, and authority of Satan shall rise and rule for 42 months. The beast has ten horns and seven heads, with one head having a wound. It looks like a leopard with bear's feet and the mouth of a lion. A second beast will use the power of the first beast, work miracles, and build images to the wounded head. The second beast has two horns like the lamb but speaks like Satan. The first beast will put to death those who would not worship it. All the Godless people shall receive the mark of the beast, 666, on their right hand or forehead so that they can buy and sell. During this time, God's people will be defeated.

At this juncture 144,000 virgin men who have been found pure by God are redeemed, and are presented to be the first to stand by Christ.

Seventh Trumpet brings three angels to declare the end, the judgment day. Babylon has fallen, all those with the mark of the beast will soon be punished. Happy are those who die for Jesus from then until the end.

Matthew: There will be a time of awful horror, more than the world has ever known. For the sake of God's chosen people, He has reduced this period. Afterwards many false messiahs will come. Soon following that, the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. Then when Jesus comes in glory, His angels shall gather up His people from one end of the earth to the other.

Based on the clues given above, Christians might search through history to see how many events might have already occurred and how many events are to come until the final day. In accordance to Daniel's revelation to the king of Babylon, there existed four empires that may fit his description. After Babylon's total collapse by around 400 BC, the Persian Empire, a lesser empire, was at the height of power and already in decline. By 300 BC, the Persian Empire was conquered by the armies of Alexander the Great, as his Macedonian Empire rose to conquer all the way to India. The empire of Alexander basically conquered everything. However, by 150 BC the mighty Greeks were themselves defeated by the Romans, an empire like no other. Along with the Greeks, the Persians, and the Egyptians, a long list of other nations were all crushed and brought under Roman rule. The Roman Empire is fit to be called the empire of iron. By 400 AD, the empire of iron broke apart with the western territories quickly plundered by barbarians. Then in Europe, from the ashes, the individual kingdoms began to strengthen themselves as well as fight among themselves. Many alliances were formed and sealed by marriage. By the 1800's, the ruling houses of Europe were all thoroughly related, forming essentially one family. As they fought among themselves, they were nevertheless interlocked by marriage and the acceptance of Christianity. On rare occasions, these bickering kingdoms fought together as one, as crusaders in the Holy Land. If one accepts this suggestion that the European kingdoms form the divided empire of iron which comes from Roman heritage and clay, then there shall be no more empires. When the last of the European ruling houses dissolve, the Kingdom of Heaven will have been prepared.

If one accepts the suggestion that the seals to the scroll of human destiny were broken by Jesus every few hundred years starting at the moment He was sacrificed, then we must question how many seals have already been opened. Between 0 - 400 AD, the conquering Romans remained in power. This may have been granted by the first seal. When the second seal was broken, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia experienced a period of war and death. With the plundering of Rome, Europe was sent into a period of chaos. From the East, the Huns led by Attila attacked Europe. The fighting in Europe

continued until Charlemagne established a new western empire in 800 AD. Then, Europe stabilized into a period of feudalism as the third seal was broken, where the people struggled under a subsistence agrarian lifestyle controlled by warlords. Yet, the Book of Revelation also revealed that Judaism, symbolized as the vineyard, and Christianity, symbolized as the olive tree, would survive this period. After 1200 AD Europe entered an age of darkness with the fourth seal. By 1350, the Black Death brought back by the crusading knights in the Holy Land had spread across Europe. Before it was all over, nearly one-half of the European population and perhaps one-fourth of the world population were taken by the plague. Looting, fighting, and famine came with such turmoil. All this was predicted in Revelation. Thus, what is commonly known as the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse" may have already passed. By 1600 AD, Europe was free from the last horseman, embracing the Renaissance.

The fifth seal cannot be opened until the number of the martyrs who are to die in spreading the Word is nearly complete. The European globalization, which started in the 1500's, reached its full force by the 1600's. The Body of Christ went with them to the distant lands of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Whether done correctly or incorrectly, thousands of dedicated missionaries risked their lives to bring the Word to every land. Wherever they went, they were often faced with great opposition. Yet, in every land there would be those who God had led to them, and the Body of Christ grew. Many died so that the world could be saved. By the 1800's the New Testament was translated into over twenty languages. With the explosion in world travel and communications in the following 150 years, the Bible was translated into more than 1000 languages. Today while not every land is free to worship the Lord in public, nearly everyone has heard of Jesus and has the ability to acquire the Word, even if one has to read it under the cover of secrecy. At the same time, the killing of Christian missionaries is starting to taper off for a brief moment. Perhaps the fifth seal could be and has been opened. If this is true, then the world stands at the edge of the sixth seal, which will conclude the worldly events.

Upon the opening of the sixth seal, the world will be struck by earthquakes. Today we know that several regions of the world, including California, rest on major fault lines that are overdue for shifting. This means that the pressure is building up far more than ever before. The idea of a single earthquake triggering a global tectonic adjustment is within scientific feasibility. However, the Lord will trigger the rocking of the world. As it is foretold, the people of the world shall continue in their wicked ways. This is because science will explain how things happened and the people will stop asking why it happened. As a result of this earth surface adjustment, volcanic eruptions may unleash tons and tons of ash into the sky to black out the sun. We know the sun will not be destroyed, based on later words. The same ash might refract the light of the moon so that the color turns red. The moon's light is often refracted into many colors. On some nights, one can even see a blue moon. If this happens to fulfill prophecy, again the scientists will explain how it happened. Yet, Christians will know that the time is near.

For decades scientists have studied the possibility of the earth being struck by large asteroids. Thus, when a swarm of asteroids finally strikes the earth as falling stars, the scientists too will explain how it happened. The most important event of this period before the end is the marking of God's people. Out of billions, 144,000 people will be found to be worthy to be God's servants. This does not mean that the rest of the people are damned. However, less than one in ten thousand will be found pure enough to do God's work in the trying years to come. It is said that these people will be from the tribes of Israel. Yet, we know that people can become Jews by converting to Judaism. Further, Paul revealed that a true Jew is anyone who obeys God (3). Therefore, to belong to the tribes of Israel is not necessarily a matter of blood relations, for God has scattered the bloodline of the Jews to distant nations, beyond total traceability. Instead, the tribes of Israel are the people of God, the same people who prophecy has foretold will dwell with Jesus in a restored Jerusalem. Within the lifetime of these 144,000, the world shall be prepared for Jesus.

Upon the opening of the seventh seal, God takes specific actions to bring this world left to man to an end. Based on the description, we might see fountains of fiery lava pouring from the earth and bursting into the air like the blood of the land to kill onethird of the trees. Fire might pour out of undersea volcanoes to kill one-third of the oceans and ships. Then the Bible speaks of a large star burning like a torch, perhaps a comet, crashing onto earth. If it is a comet, the material it is composed of might be quite poisonous. This material as it breaks apart in the atmosphere most certainly will get into the fresh water ways, causing many who drink the poisoned water to die.

The fourth trumpet signals a nearly unimaginable event concerning the sun, moon, and stars losing their brightness. If this act of the Lord is unexplainable, then maybe the world will bow down in fear. However, the scientists and leaders of the world will probably find ways to explain these unnatural events in a scientific manner, and the people will continue sinning. One way in which the celestial objects may appear to change their behavior for those standing on Earth is for the Earth's axis to tilt gradually after being struck by the falling star. With this tilting, periods of daylight in the populated regions of the world could grow shorter and the exposure to the moon could decrease. Based on the description in Revelation, it does not sound like a reduction in the total radiation from the Sun will be the cause. According to astrophysical concepts, the Earth's environment might survive a slight adjustment in the axis. However, a third less radiant energy from the Sun would send the world into an ice age.

The fifth trumpet causes another star to fall. This star, perhaps a comet or large asteroid, will open up the earth to release smoke and an awful creature resembling a locust. This locust-like creature will appear to have a crown, a face resembling that of a man, hair resembling that of a woman, teeth resembling that of a lion, and a scorpion's tail. The Bible does not describe the size of these creatures. Therefore, they could be insects, bacteria, or even viruses. Many bacteria and viruses do indeed resemble larger things, and they can sting us from within. The reason why we must ask whether these creatures are bacteria or virus is because none of the

people in this world except for the 144,000 of God's servants will escape them. Walls and weapons shall not hold them back. Also, the possibility that a virus could lie dormant beneath the earth, trapped along with other living things of bygone days, is not scientifically unbelievable.

The sixth trumpet may signal the release of fire, smoke, and sulfur from the earth. The earth, weakened by the bombardment of stars, might literally crack open at places to release the fire and contents within. While this may not be the way the fire comes, one-third of humanity will be killed by fire, smoke, and sulfur. Those who are killed may actually be the fortunate ones if they can be received by God. The people who remain will bear witness to the day of Satan for which he has been working diligently since the birth of Jesus. In Satan's hour, a beast shall rise. The Bible tells us that this beast is actually a world order that consists of seven kingdoms, of which five have fallen, one presently rules, and one remains to rule. The one still to rule shall rule for a short time. One of the kingdoms that has fallen shall rise again only to be destroyed. Then there will be ten kingdoms united in one purpose to rule a little while to empower the beast. These ten shall fight against the servants of God, the followers of the Lamb. On top of this beast sits a great city of commerce and corruption with the symbolic name of Babylon.

If Christians believe that the completion is near, then signs of this beast might already be appearing. While the observation below could be flawed, perhaps it is worth some exploration by Christians in their studies and prayers. As we look at our world two millenniums after Christ, we find seven nations interlocked in commerce through a global stock market: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Italy, France, Japan, and Germany. Of these seven, the ruling houses of Italy, France, Japan, and Germany have all collapsed. In recent times, France was conquered by Germany, while Germany, Italy, and Japan were defeated by the Allied powers. While England has fared better, the days of the British Empire are all but gone. Since WWII, the United States has been the premier world power, the kingdom that still rules. Canada is a nation that has yet to obtain global influence. Of these seven, Germany is the

one nation that was almost completely devastated after WWII. If Germany represents the head with the wound, then it shall rise again. As we look upon the world, there could be several groups of nations that might rise to power under one purpose. As China, India, and other nations begin to catch up to the West, petroleum might quickly become a critical resource. Possessing over half the world's oil resources, the nations of OPEC, especially those in the Middle East, might leverage it into power. However, their power will be given to the beast. Alternatively, the nations of Southeast Asia could easily unite into a prosperity sphere that economically dominates.

In the last hour, the Bible tells us that a false prophet will lead even Christians astray. He will build a monument to the wounded nation. He will use the power of the beast against God's people. In the end only the true Christians will avoid the corruption. The power of the beast is from commerce, and through commerce it shall control the people with its mark. The mark of the beast is ironically not a mark of Satan. Instead, it is a mark of completion six, six, six. Today, the world is quickly racing towards a moneyless, credit-based financial system. As the new wave of information technology is applied to link everyone in the world, it is most certainly viable that the credit cards of today will eventually be planted on the body. Never before in history was this possible.

According to the Bible, the beast shall fight against and kill those who praise God. They are the final sacrifices for the Lamb. That is why the Bible encourages Christians to accept their fate in the darkest hour of the beast. Those who are meant to die will and must die. The rest might yield to the beast and reject the Lord. As this unfolds, it is said that 144,000 pure men of God will stand before Jesus. Through the centuries, some disciples were so dedicated to God that they were able to completely free themselves of worldly temptations. They were even free of the basic desire for offspring and family. These men will be redeemed through their purity, and not saved through God's forgiveness.

When we turn again to the prophecies of Daniel, we find four kingdoms on the last days. Perhaps our theory for Revelation might

also fit into Daniel's vision. One kingdom is that of the bear. This kingdom is noted for its consumption and its knowledge of the Lord, for the number of ribs that the bear chews on is three and the bear stands upright like a man. Perhaps the fact that it is chewing on the three ribs implies that it is a kingdom where the ways of the Lord is being crushed by hunger or lust. In the twentieth century, the United States must be recognized as the premier consumer state, chewing up the world's resources and maybe bringing about the destiny of man. It is a nation founded on Christian ethics but drifting away from the Lord.

Another kingdom is like the lion, which symbolizes a land strong yet without knowledge of the Lord. As it is rising in power, the nation shall be beaten down and be given an understanding of the Lord so that the lion is made to stand like a man. As we look upon the world today, the country of China is a land with one-fourth of the world's people and quickly ascending in economic strength. It is also a land which has never really had a chance to know Christianity. Although the people have expressed much willingness, the government has hindered the spreading of the gospel for many decades. Christians must ask whether this could be the lion.

The third kingdom is that of the leopard with four heads. If we turn to the description of the beast, four of the theorized heads are in Europe: Germany, France, Italy, England. If these four nations become the heads of a united European Community, could this be the leopard? As Daniel described, such a kingdom would be rising in power and authority. The last kingdom has ten horns with one rising up bragging and boasting against the Lord, and the little horn takes down three other horns. If we turn back to Revelation at this point, the conclusion could be that these four kingdoms combine to form the beast. Indeed, the beast has pieces of the leopard, lion, bear, and ten horns. If our theory is true, the European Community will be the body of the beast. The United States will be the foundation on which the beast stands. China will be the way in which the beast consumes and grows stronger. The ten horns are then the crowning piece. From it the false prophet may come. Its existence will be so offensive that the Lord shall destroy it, but spare the other three kingdoms stripped of power.

The gospels recorded that Jesus personally told us that before these last events, there would be a time of awful horrors especially for God's own people. Could WWII and the Holocaust for the Jews be this time of awful horror? In a few short years, 45 million people across the world were killed. Never before in history has such an event occurred. Yet, in one generation humanity has already forgotten the horror. By the end of WWII, six million Jews were murdered in unspeakable manners. Had God not shortened the period of war, there is no telling how many more lives would have been lost. If we accept WWII as the period of awful horror, then the world is in a period where many false prophets will come. Many will come claiming to have the power of God. Many will even proclaim to be Jesus. During this time when the purity of Christians is tested, Christians must hold tight to the teachings of the Bible. If a Christian's faith is not strong enough to identify false prophets, then he must test them with the Bible. Surely, anyone who claims the powers of God cannot teach something that contradicts God's truth. Also, the Bible is very specific about how Jesus will come. Many people will be led away from God during this period, which could be far worse than the awful horror.

The Last Days

Joel: There will be bloodshed and clouds of smoke on the last days.

The sun will darken and the moon will turn red. God will restore Jerusalem and gather all nations to the valley of judgment. Egypt will be a desert and Edom will be a wasted ruins. On the last days God will pour out His Spirit to everyone, even His servants. Young men and women will have visions and old men and women will have dreams.

Micah: Many nations will come to Israel to follow God from Zion.

The Lord will settle disputes among nations, and there will be peace. The Lord will hammer swords into plows and spears into pruning knives. The Jews will return and crush many nations.

Zephaniah: God will destroy everything, even the sun and the stars. All will worship Him, and all other gods will be crushed. The end will come suddenly.

Zechariah: - The Lord will place the people under the powers of their rulers, and these rulers will devastate the earth.

- God will get rid of three shepherds who hate Him in a single month.
- Let those who are to die, die.
- The rod of favor shall be broken and the Covenant canceled.
- The rod of unity shall be broken, and Judah and Israel will be shattered.
- A worthless shepherd shall abandon the people.
- All nations will attack Israel, and the Lord will destroy all those nations.
- The Lord will bring diseases on the attackers.
- On the last day, there will be warmth and continuous day. Jerusalem will rise again.

Ezekiel: Gog will attack Israel, and the Lord will intervene.

Isaiah: On that day, the Lord will shake the earth, and the people will live in caves and holes in the ground. Someday everyone will be filled with knowledge of the Lord, and the wolves and sheep will live in peace. A time is coming to punish the powers above and the rulers of the earth. They shall be locked up in prisons until the time of their punishment. There shall be a banquet, and Death shall be destroyed forever. Before that time the people shall boast that they have made a treaty with Death and the World of the Dead. Hail storms will sweep away all the lies, and floods will destroy their security. There will be a New Earth and New Heaven, and the past will be forgotten. In the New Jerusalem, people living to 600 will be considered young. There will be peace. Egypt and Assyria will both recognize the Lord, and the three nations will be united to be a blessing to the world.

Jeremiah: On the last day, the bodies of those killed by the Lord will lie scattered all over the earth.

Revelation: At the completion of the seventh seal, the events will occur as the angels pronounce. The earth will be harvested, first with the grapes in the vineyard being cut down and placed in the wine press of God's furious anger. Then the last plagues will be released as bowls of God's anger.

First Bowl brings sores on those with the mark of the beast.

Second Bowl causes the sea to die.

Third Bowl turns rivers into blood.

Fourth Bowl brings fire to burn people.

Fifth Bowl causes darkness to fall.

Sixth Bowl causes the Euphrates to dry up and the three evils bring the people together for one last battle at Armageddon.

Seventh Bowl brings an earthquake that destroys all the cities.

Then the great city of Babylon will be destroyed and the kings of the earth will mourn its loss. Babylon is a city of corruption surrounded by rivers where people from all over the world come to trade. It sits on the back of the beast. Finally, Jesus will come riding a white horse accompanied by the army of Heaven behind Him. On His robe will be written, "The Word of God, King of Kings." The beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. Their armies are killed and Satan is chained in the Abyss for 1000 years. Then all those who had died in His name are awakened forever to rule with Jesus. After 1000 years Satan will be released to tempt the nations of the earth again. After surrounding the city of God's people with a massive army, God will destroy them all and pronounce judgment on all the dead except those first brought to life. Those whose names are not in the Book of Life are thrown into the lake of fire with Death and the World of the Dead. Then God and His people will live together under a New Heaven and New Earth forever in love and peace. The Holy City of God will descend, and all whose names are in the Book of Life will be permitted to enter it and eat from the Tree of Life. The kings of the earth will bring their wealth into it.

However, all those not worthy will be left outside and theirs is the second death in the lake of fire. The kings of the earth are the servants of God who are forever in His light.

Matthew: The hour of Jesus' arrival is only known to God, and on that hour one will be taken while the other is left behind.

As the faithful servants of God are sacrificed in Satan's finest hour, the Dark One and all his followers shall be taken down. First, the grapes are harvested from the vineyard, which is generally a symbol for the Jews. As foretold, God will reject His people when the sky and the earth have been measured, and that time could be at hand. Following the punishment of His first chosen people, all the people who have surrendered themselves to the beast will be punished. As the evil ones bring their armies to battle one last time, the Lord will unleash His final fury by crushing all the cities. Then the symbolic city of Babylon, which once was Rome, will be destroyed. If Christians look upon the cities of today, one city is the great candidate for Babylon. New York City, Manhattan, is a city that literally sits on several waterways. It is the financial center of the world, a place where greed is the driving element and the people are consumed with the activities of this world. While not everyone in the city may be totally evil, throughout history God has often destroyed cities when the people as a whole have fallen. The dead will receive their individual judgment on the last day. If we accept Daniel's prophecies, then perhaps the world will not change very much between the current day and the end. Therefore, while another great city of corruption could rise to be the center of global commerce, that probability is less than New York City maintaining its position until the right time.

As foretold, Jesus will come late in the evening. When He comes, the evil in the world will be defeated. All those who died for the Lamb will rise and rule with Jesus as kings while the survivors of God's fury are ruled over directly by Jesus for 1000 years. In this time, the truth of God will be directly given to them, and the evil spirits that once tempted them will not be present. In this fourth and last age of man, his spirit will soar like an eagle. Yet, the evil in

man's heart will still linger and manage to grow. Therefore after 1000 years, Satan must be used by God again to test and filter the branches of humanity. Many will again be led astray. As they surround Jerusalem, the center of Jesus' rule on earth, God will simply destroy them, and finally Satan is thrown in the fires of Hell. Yet, the Bible never says that God will destroy mankind. Instead, God will change the universe and get rid of the World of the Dead. The dead who have turned toward goodness before death will be with God, and the evil will be thrown into Hell. Those who are still alive on earth will witness God's city descend. Those who are worthy can then enter the city and enjoy everlasting life while others are left outside. Those left outside will die and end up in Hell, for there is no longer the World of the Dead. Among those in the World of the Dead are the Jews and even Christians. who did not fully receive the truth of God. They will be shown the Word in all fullness and be raised to life if they are worthy. However, in the World of the Dead are also those Jews who did receive but rejected the Word in life, deciding not to attend the banquet of the Lamb, and also those Christians who ignored the true meaning of Christ, making themselves unacceptable for the banquet of the lamb. They will be thrown into the darkness as foretold. In the New Heaven and Earth those who ruled with Jesus in the 1000 year's reign will remain as kings of the world. It is said that these kings will bring the wealth of the world into the city. Perhaps the wealth of the world is not tangible treasures but those spirits that have undergone a rebirth on the outside.

The prophets of old clearly agree with many points in Revelation. Zechariah tells of getting rid of three shepherds, which may be Satan, the false prophet, and the beast. He also talks of another shepherd that may, during the reign of Jesus, abandon the people. Maybe that is how Satan will regain power. Isaiah talks about the hiding of people in caves, the imprisonment of powers in Heaven which would include Satan, the destruction of Death and the World of the Dead, and a new Jerusalem.

One may ask regarding Jesus' promise that when He comes only some will be taken: How will they be taken? Some Christians may hope that they will survive the dark times and be raptured.

However, does the desire to survive show that one is bound by this earth? If some Christians survive, let them survive by the grace of God, not by their cowardliness. Jesus taught us that one must give up this life to receive the next. In the darkest moment, maybe the Christians who are taken to Heaven are those who refuse to renounce their faith even when their own families have turned against them. Maybe the way they are taken is through the sacrifice of their bodies in fighting the beast. God raptures the spirit of man, for the body is flawed and temporary. Paul clearly stated that those still alive at the coming will be second to those who have sacrificed their bodies for the Lamb (4).

CHAPTER IV

THE CALLING

Everything Jesus did and is still doing centers around one objective: Calling us to God the Father. If we do not respond to the calling, nothing else is of importance. A man can know all the truth in the world, but without God and his fellow man, he is nothing. A man can do everything in accordance with the laws, but without love for God and his fellow man in his heart, he is nothing. In the first three chapters, this disciple strived to join a long list of fellow Christians in exploring the truth and plan of the Lord. This is all done to prepare the right people for the calling by the Lord and to help fellow Christians to further advance ourselves to do the Lord's work. In our efforts, all new revelations are by the inspiration of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. In our efforts, all failures are due to the impurity of our spirits, which have so often turned away from God. Whether or not we have failed in helping those who have yet to receive the truth of God, our prayers are always for the Lord to lead everyone to His side and for the Lord to forgive us messengers.

This last chapter of the book is therefore dedicated to all Christians and all those who are to become Christians. The first section explores how we can reach out to God and humbly ask for His calling. The second section explores how Christians should build the Body of Christ. Lastly, the third section explores the great work that must be done and the many sacrifices that must be made for the completion of God's plan.

SECTION IV.1:

REACHING OUT TO THE LORD

Becoming a Christian is not a mental decision. It is a journey of the spirit. This journey demands patience and perseverance, for each person grows at his own pace and through a specific set of stimuli that only God knows how to prepare. God could alter everything in this world simply with a word; however, the igniting of our spirits to become acceptable to God's grace and a being of Heaven is something that each spirit must do by itself. Therefore we must never give up. If we are of the right spiritual quality, God will guide us and shape us. Perhaps at first we are far away from the Word. At the right time the Word will pour into us to spark and burst the spirit to life. That spark is sustained by the goodness within us. God has always said that it is the goodness within us that shall be our salvation. When an arrogant person has had his arrogance beaten down, then maybe his heart will be ready for the Word. When a lonely person realizes that nothing in this world can fill his emptiness, then maybe his heart will be ready for the Word. When a fearful person is consumed by his worries, then maybe he will turn to the Word.

Before we are ready to embrace the Word, we must begin the journey by feeling the presence of our spirits. We must block our hearts and minds from the temptations and troubles of this world and feel that our existence extends beyond the physical, beyond the here and now. The next step is to reach out with our spirits to find God. This is by prayer, and there is no substitution for prayer. During this phase of development, one should carefully read the Bible, perhaps first not as believer but in preparation for what might come. In our prayers we must remember that God is the only absolute good, and He has planted this basic understanding of goodness into all the hearts of men. For those who turn away from goodness, their prayers will find nothing except perhaps the Dark One. However, for those who embrace goodness, their prayers will drive the Dark One and his evil minions away. At the same time we must trust that God

is reaching out to us spiritually. To shape our spirits and increase our faith in Him, God may guide our lives in remarkable ways. Therefore, we must examine the events of our lives carefully to understand how the Lord is guiding us. The realization of His guidance will strengthen our journey.

Throughout history only a very few of God's people have had the spiritual quality to receive the Holy Spirit by themselves. That is why Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and a few others are so special. For the rest of us average people, we can only go so far in our personal quest for goodness. Even after much effort, there is still that huge gap between our spirits and the Spirit of God. Jesus is the bridge across that gap, and the bridge is built from both sides. From our side, He gave the precious truth of God. In understanding God's plan, through Jesus, we can push beyond our past limits in goodness and faith. From God's side, Jesus brought to God a new spiritual experience of what it is like to be man. With it, the Lord reaches out further into all those who accept this bridge. For some, mere faith in Jesus as the Son of God working for them is enough for the bridge from the Lord's side to reach them. For others more consumed by doubt, Jesus' gift of truth must be embraced tightly for the bridge to be completed. The truth of Jesus is captured in the Holy Bible, and there is no substitution for reading the Holy Bible. Once the bridge between God and us is complete, the Spirit of God will come into us. If the bridge is weak, the Spirit will come as a trickle. If the bridge is wide, the Spirit will come pouring through. Whether the bridge is strong or weak, one is baptized by the Holy Spirit and a Christian is spiritually born.

For many the journey is not nearly so direct. Some may spend years groping in their exploration of different religions. Others may have only mentally accepted the teachings in the Bible. If one has accepted the Bible by reasoning, then one must embrace it in actions also in order to change the spirit. If one's mind is consumed by doubts about which religion to follow, then it is better to not procrastinate and study all the religions. One owes it to oneself to find out firsthand about Christianity through prayer and the Bible. When the right seed is planted, then God will help the seed to grow once the soil is ready, to bring everlasting life.

All those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit have received the calling from God. Prior to the calling, people reaching out to God must dedicate themselves to that quest. An army of Christian brothers and sisters is out there, eager to help with encouragement, insights, and prayers. However, the journey of the spirit must be made by oneself. For those who have already received the calling, God has not only chosen you but also empowered you for His work. As we have seen with King Saul, the Spirit of God could leave someone if he turns to the darkness. The Spirit will help and guide us, but the power of choice is and will be ours. Pray that no Christians fall.

God's work is simple and clear. Those called must help others who are lost to find Him and help those who have found Him to increase their relationship with Him. The work begins by seeking out fellow Christians to be together in fellowship. When Christians work together, their power is amplified. So strong is this union of spirits, that Jesus proclaimed that whenever two Christians pray together He will be there. The relationship between Christians must be that of words, actions, and heart. Through the mind Christians must help each other further understand God's truth, a lifelong quest. Through actions Christians must inspire each other to serve God's will. Through love Christians must raise the spirits of each other towards goodness.

The search for fellow Christians is in itself a treacherous journey because the road is lined with traps by Satan. In this journey there will be many false prophets who use the name of Jesus. However, listen to them carefully and see whether they can confess that they belong to Jesus. Even when someone declares that he belongs to Jesus, his faith may still be weak and fragile. Therefore even among Jesus' people, we must test to see if others know the true Jesus embodied by the Bible. A Christian who cannot accept the Bible as God's message is a Christian whose faith has faltered. Other Christians must pray for him and help him. Yet, they must not let this weakness of faith pull the group down. This is one reason why Christians must be as shrewd as the snake and as gentle as the dove.

A Christian who embarks upon a mission to spread the good news of Jesus must be guided by the Holy Spirit. The work that is to be done is not something that can be achieved through one's cleverness. Christians who believe that they have the power to turn others into Christians will not have their labors bear the right fruit. The power and the right to bring a new member into the family of Christ belong only to God. On this mission, a Christian's real objective is to convince others to read the Bible with an open mind and spirit, and to reach out to God and Jesus in prayer. Because some people are stubborn, the Bible must at times be spoon-fed to them in simplistic ways. However, any Christian who believes that his words are superior to that of the Bible will not have his labor bear the right fruit. The work of a Christian is long and treacherous. Along the way we may lose ourselves to the evil that we are fighting if we lose faith. Any reward we receive is not by our accomplishments but through the love of God. A Christian works not for rewards or gains. A Christian works because he has to, because he loves and the work is a part of that love.

SECTION IV.2:

BUILDING THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Body of Christ is the union of all His disciples. As Paul taught us there is one God, one Word, one Holy Spirit, and therefore one Body. As Christians find each other in fellowship, the above truth must be in their hearts. If this is the truth, why are there so many different churches out there all proclaiming that their way of worship is the most correct way? The churches are divided because man is weak in his understanding of the Word. However, in weakness the Body of Christ still grows. Nevertheless, the goal of every Christian should be to unify the Body. To do this we must all explore the essence of a Christian church and question what modern churches have become to prevent this unification.

A church stands when a group of Christians gathers in fellowship to praise the Lord and pray to Him as His children. Within the church those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit should serve as the foundation. They should reveal to each other the insights that the Holy Spirit has given them, and they should contribute their talents empowered by the Holy Spirit towards the growth of the church. There is a need for teachers, pastors, counselors, as well as accountants and coordinators. Since all Christians are on this journey towards God, it is essential that there be a freedom of expression for those with insights given by the Holy Spirit, even when some of these insights may be clouded by personal weakness. Upon the foundation of empowered Christians must rest the future bricks of the church, which are all those who would like to hear the Word. Some may hear and walk away while others may hear and start on the journey. The responsibility of the church is to make sure that the good news of Jesus is delivered completely and clearly. A church cannot force anyone to be a Christian. To gather these future bricks the foundation of the church must extend out far beyond its walls. The disciples of Christ must take the good news of Jesus to the people and invite them gently to come and learn more.

In forming this foundation we must remember that Paul taught us that the Holy Spirit empowers in different ways. When the people are weak, the Spirit may enable them to see miracles. When the people are mature and strong, the Spirit may give them words of great depth and meaning. Therefore, a Christian should yearn not for miracles but for the truth. The absence of miracles does not mean that the Holy Spirit is not at work. If one must question whether someone is baptized with the Holy Spirit, then observe whether his labors bear the right kind of fruit. Also, remember that the Lord does not need man to heal the sick or even build His temples. When the Lord grants someone the power to heal, it is not to help the sick but to show Himself to those weak in faith.

Within the practices of the church Jesus asked for very little. He asked that we remember Him in communion. Communion is not a ritual that Christians must conduct. It is an act of love among Christians, just like the time when the apostles gathered to accept bread and wine from one loaf and one cup at the night of the last supper. As we take the bread, we should awaken our spirits to the truth that we are all of the Body of Christ. As we take the wine, we should awaken our spirits to the truth that we are all filled with the power of Christ, which is the Holy Spirit. Communion should involve the awakening and renewal of the spirit. However, this may not be true for all who partake of communion. For some it may be a public expression that they are seeking Jesus and want to be a part of the Body. Ultimately, it is the foundation of the church that must decide whether the act of communion is to be denied to those who are not yet baptized by the Holy Spirit. Jesus has given His disciples the right to decide this and all things.

The second practice that Jesus asked for is the baptizing of those who are to be a part of the Body. Ultimately, God decides who should be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the baptism by water is an anointment of someone chosen by God who has dedicated himself to serve God. Jesus was not baptized until the age of thirty, when He was ready to do God's work. In the Book of Acts, some gentiles were already baptized by the Holy Spirit when Peter decided to baptize them with water. If a person is baptized with water prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, that baptism is a public

declaration that one is turning away from sin and accepting Jesus at least in the mind. The Holy Spirit then comes when one has embraced Jesus in the heart. Given these points, the baptism of an infant is more for the parents than the child, for the spirits of children are acceptable by God. In such a baptism, the parents pledge to God that they will raise the child in the truth of Jesus.

If children are spiritually acceptable to God, one may ask at what age does a child become an adult and will be judged by God as an adult. Based on the Old Testament and New Testament, there are some clues. In the times of Moses, Levi priests were called into the service of God at the age of thirty. Jesus also started His work at the age of thirty. On the other hand, a young man at the age of twenty was eligible to be drafted for war. Based on these clues one might conclude that a man reaches physical maturity at the age of twenty and spiritual maturity at the age of thirty. Indeed, a man in his twenties is still very much a child spiritually, "consumed by the passions of youth" as Paul said. Man judges by the body while God judges by the spirit. Though some spirits may require Jesus much earlier in growth than others, the writings seem to indicate that by thirty we all need Jesus to receive God's grace.

The third practice that Jesus asked for is that those people dedicated to His work be cared for by other Christians who can earn money. Jesus never demanded that Christians give one-tenth (tithe) of their earnings; that would be enforcing a law and laws bring death. Instead, those who believe they must offer the tithe, they must do what their faith demands. Otherwise in their hearts they will be robbing from God. Mature Christians give out of love, not out of obedience of the law. The first step a Christian should take is to free himself from being a slave to money. The early Christians did this by placing all their money together so that there was no obsession with ownership. Then Christians took only what they needed, because showering oneself with luxuries while others go without food is against the will of God. The money should be devoted to God's work. In doing God's work, Jesus repeatedly reminded us that it is the poor who needs money. The world has enough wealth to take care of everyone. However, God left this wealth unevenly distributed

in people's hands so that some are given great responsibilities. By feeding and sheltering the poor we have in essence given to Jesus, for the poor are the best building blocks for the Body of Christ. Therefore, as a church pools together the resources given out of love, it must carefully decide the work that must be done with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In building the structure that is to shelter the congregation, Christians should ask themselves whether they are building what is needed or a monument to their pride. The church building is for the many needs of the people, for God is everywhere and He does not need temples in His name.

If the people cannot free themselves from the laws, then we must examine the precise purpose of the tithe offering. The letters of the law specify that the people must offer one-tenth of the best of what they produce each year. By giving up the best, they free themselves of the greed and enslavement of the material world. To complete this act of freedom, some of the offering is simply destroyed so that not even the temple is bound by greed. Christians obeying the tithe might conduct a burnt offering of cash. Yet, God has told the Jews that He has no need of such offerings if the people continue to sin. Then, the offering of every third year is to be given to support the priests. In today's terms, a priest or pastor would receive 33% of the church's offerings. The rest of the offerings, according to the law of the tithe, is to be consumed by the people together in the holy place. In today's terms, the people of the church will gather together to dine in fellowship, spending the other 60% of the offerings on food. This is what the tithe called for, and God proclaimed to His people that if they can give the best to Him, then He will reward them abundantly. Yet, Christians should not ask for or even expect rewards for what they do out of love.

The fourth practice that Jesus asked of Christians is that they must keep the Body pure. The foundation of the church must be set firmly. We all sin, and it is because of our sins that we need Jesus. Still, a Christian must continuously fight against his sins, which cause him to turn away from God. A Christian fights by revealing his entire self, good and evil, all to God and asking God for the power to wash away the evil. A Christian fights by confessing his sins to other Christians and asking for their help in washing

away the evil. However, there may come a point where a Christian stops fighting and surrenders himself to evil. He will justify his evilness and lead others away from the fight. Then the Holy Spirit will leave him, and his efforts will bear bad fruit. At this point he must be separated from the foundation of the church with prayer for God to take him and reshape him in the world so that he is once again ready to fight the darkness.

This need to keep the Body pure should not be taken as a witch hunt where Christians all accuse each other. People accuse each other because they look at actions, which they do not understand. Paul has told us that all things are pure to those who themselves are pure. Therefore, before accusing someone of doing something that is impure, a Christian better look at his own heart. A Jew can eat a pig and be impure, but a Christian can eat anything and not be affected. Likewise, one Christian may live a certain way in harmony with God while another Christian may look on and be filled with thoughts of corruption. Knowing that our brothers and sisters are weak, we should try to reduce their level of corruption. However, true impurity is really a matter of the spirit. Since man can only observe actions, we must ask how these actions reflect upon a person's heart. We must ask whether the person is knowingly damaging the love between himself and God or between himself and his fellow man. If he knowingly and willingly does this, he is being led by evil. If he refuses to change, he has fallen to evil.

As the ultimate expression of love, Jesus granted to those who are a part of His Body His own authority. If the Body of Christ, the community of Christians who will be with Jesus in Heaven, decides to forgive the sins of someone, the sins will be forgiven by Jesus and God. However, this authority belongs only to those who are truly of the Body, whose actions are guided by the Holy Spirit. If this authority is abused, then the Christian stands to separate himself from the Holy Spirit. As Christians we must remember that upon a person's spiritual birth and transformation, his past sins are forgotten by God. Therefore, our forgiveness of a new Christian's sins should be automatic. Jesus told the new Christians to sin no more, and this is where the authority applies. When fellow Christians confess their sins to us, we must look upon the Holy Spirit to help us see whether

their repentance is sincere. However, it must be noted that, according to John, some sins will bring death because the deeds imply that they are lost to darkness. As with all authority, this is a responsibility, not a gift. With it we become servants.

If these concepts seem reasonable, the question is why Christian churches are so divided. Today, instead of just calling ourselves Christians or disciples of Jesus, we want to categorize ourselves as Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Orthodox, and a whole cast of other denominations. As this disciple looks upon this division of the Body, he sees trivial differences and a few fundamental differences. Because people are different, it is only natural that Christians will want to praise God in different ways. Some churches might want to sing loudly while others want to sing softly. Some groups might want the church to reflect a certain cultural trait while other groups want another. All these differences are not important as long as there is Christian love in everyone's hearts. The church is the people, and they should decide how to express their love. If there is a group of Christians who proclaim that their way of worshiping God is the most proper, then they may wish to think about their humility. The Body of Christ should celebrate these differences. In fact, churches should travel to visit each other in fellowship and share their expressions of love for God.

The fundamental issues tend to extend from human weaknesses and churches yielding to them. The first weakness, as revealed when Israel wanted a king, is that people, because of their sins, are afraid of God. They do not want to show themselves to God or communicate with Him directly. Instead, they want to communicate with and be guided by someone like them, less powerful and with more human traits. Therefore, even Christians may want to seek beings of Heaven, such as angels and human beings who were received by God, to use them as messengers to God. This could be justified because God also used angels to deliver messages to the Israelites. However, if Christians pray to these beings of Heaven, they would be denying the Holy Spirit within them, which directly connects them with the Lord. They would be reaching out to beings far away

when the Lord is in their hearts. Jesus never asked us to pray to Him, but only in His name. When Jesus taught us how to pray, the prayer was addressed to the Lord, to God, with whom He is one. In Revelation when John wanted to bow to an angel, the angel forbade him, for they are on the same level and man should only bow to God. In the second commandment, God commands us to not make images, not even of beings in Heaven. Therefore, a Christian church should not have any statues to which people would bow down to pray.

The second fundamental issue is that humans in their weaknesses are often motivated by selfish interests. To win people over to God, churches have often resorted to catering to people's interests. We strike the fear of punishment into their hearts, and we offer the reward of Heaven. By doing this, all one manages to do is to shape people's behavior. The real objective of the church is to shape people's hearts. In the Bible, very little is devoted to describing Heaven and Hell. This may be for a purpose. A Christian works not for rewards but for love. That love naturally creates in him a desire to be in Heaven, to constantly express that love to God. The mark of mature Christians is that they would sincerely praise God even if they were sent to Hell. They would journey through Hell 10,000 times if it served God's plan. Yet, a Christian knows that God's love is far greater and would never let those who love Him leave His side. When disciples are sent into the world, their mission is to spread the truth of Jesus. The rewards in Heaven and prophecies of the future are meant for Christians as an expression of God's love and guidance. However, the focus of the Bible is on God. Likewise, our focus should always be on God and not on what God has to offer.

The third fundamental issue is the people's fear and unwillingness to accept testing. Therefore, they want an easy way to obtain salvation. In fact, they want salvation to be guaranteed. Being a Christian in words is no guarantee that one will be accepted into Heaven. In the end it is still the goodness of one's spirit and one's relationship with the Holy Spirit that determine whether the spirit can be pulled in by God. Yet many Christians do not want to hear that being a Christian is really challenging. Many Christians do

not want to see the church sending away someone who has fallen to evil. Many Christians do not want to hear that some of their sins may not be forgiven. A church must never cater to these fears. A church must never foster a simple and comfortable way of being a Christian that will lead to death.

The fourth fundamental issue is the innate resistance of the human spirit to burst into life. As a result, people want to live like machines, obeying a set of laws. A church must not allow this desire to turn Christian life into a set of laws. Christians should never have to do anything. A Christian should want to do everything that pleases God. By placing laws on people, a church may hinder them from making a choice of the heart. By placing laws on people, a church may compel others to look at the actions of people instead of their hearts. Laws can creep in through many unsuspecting ways. In a church, laws might start as peer pressure and worship might turn into rituals. When a Christian chants a prayer without feeling it in his heart, the prayer is a mere ritual. When a Christian offers exactly the tithe and not a penny more, it is a law. Rituals and laws lead to death.

The fundamental issues above, in the humble opinion of this disciple, challenge all churches, and each church deals with it differently. The heart of the church is its people, and no church can totally escape the fact that man is weak. Therefore, churches should treat each other as Christians should treat each other. As long as each is willing to fight against its weaknesses, each should be accepted as components of the Body. However, if a church has fallen to evil and intentionally caters to the desires of man, then it must be separated from the Body and left in God's hands with the prayer that God will lead it back. While the fight is harder for some than others, this disciple's heart is filled with hope, for the fight against evil clearly rages on. There are indeed very few reasons why the different components of the Body of Christ cannot come together in love and unity to face the dark times that are to come. The churches must unite under God in the name of Jesus.

SECTION IV.3:

THE WORK THAT MUST BE DONE

As disciples leave the church to carry the good news of Jesus to the world, each must contemplate on why the world is the way it is. Since the time of creation a large army of angels, varying in strength and goodness, has served God either willingly or unwillingly. Angels are sent to look after the course of nations, with each nation receiving an angel paralleling their spiritual closeness with God. God is the master of all nations, and as the Book of Exodus showed, God does on occasions speak to the prophets of other religions. However, through one branch of humanity He has chosen to ignite the spark of life to consume all nations. Throughout history when a group of people has totally corrupted their bloodline, God would prevent their continuation, for instance the Canaanites. Civilizations collapse because God permits it, and religions fall because God wills it. However, Christians know that God is tolerant and patient. He does not end anything unless it is without hope, and He has since the beginning known when things must start or come to an end.

Jesus' disciples must journey into a world under Satan's influence and ruled by other religions. If these religions and people continue to exist, then God must see hope or use in them, and therefore Christians must also treat them appropriately. Some religions such as Judaism and Islam call upon the Christian God, the one true God. Therefore, instead of fighting with each other, we should share our understanding and lack of understanding. All Christians must recognize that the foundation of our salvation rests upon the Jews. They paved the way for the gift of Jesus. The nation of Israel is the instrument that God used to bless all the nations. While most Jews today still do not accept the truth of Jesus, in each of their generations there may be those with the insight of the prophets. Likewise, when Arabs callout to the God of Abraham maybe some of them will be led by the Lord to higher insights. The power to change people belongs to God. Christians are messengers, and

the message must be delivered. If the receiver chooses to kill the messenger, so be it. It is the irony of Christianity that in sacrificing ourselves to save others we have made ourselves acceptable to God. Some other surviving major religions of the world are Buddhism and Hinduism. Both these religions recognize that man is a spiritual being that transcends the body and that the spirit ascends based on its goodness. This is a commonality to start from. Based on this foundation, they may have the capacity to call out to the true God. The difficulty with Buddhism is that it believes that the spirit of man alone is powerful enough to achieve the goodness to reach Nirvana. Indeed, if man can become perfectly good, then God can receive him. However, Christians know that man by himself can never achieve that state. Therefore, Christians might convince Buddhists that being good is not simply avoiding the corruption of this world, for that is to remain in spiritual infancy. Instead, being good is to face the temptations of this world and rise above them. Only Jesus has done this. If a Buddhist cannot succeed in this, then perhaps he may wish to call out to the true God who defines goodness. Perhaps the Christian God will lead him to seek the Word, and the Word must then be there for him to find.

Hinduism is based upon a belief in a divine reality that centers on a trinity of deities: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. Christians should convince Hindus to look deeper into this divine reality and see past their deities portrayed by idols. The power behind this reality cannot be gods made of clay or stone. It must be a power of the spirit. Therefore when a Hindu prays, he should pray with the spirit, stretching out with the spirit and searching for the goodness that is at the center of the divine reality. In this search of the spirit, he might find that the Christian truth is the truth at the center of the divine reality. He might find that the Christian God is the creator, preserver, and destroyer. Also in this journey he might realize that man is not reincarnated with many past lives. Rather, the perception of reincarnation may actually be the spirit of the living being touched by the spirits inhabiting the World of the Dead. As long as man is seeking the Lord, he is one step ahead of the atheists who completely reject God and cannot feel their own spiritual selves. Thus, Christians facing these religions must not hate

or despise. The rest of the world, for thousands of years, has been left to seek the meaning of their existence without the Word. Based on their own spiritual power and purity, they could only obtain vague glimpses of the truth with many false interpretations. Without the Word, most Christians would not do much better. Therefore, we should perhaps recognize the starting point of others and recognize the pieces of the truth that they may have found. From this position the complete truth must be given to them to help wash away centuries of confusion. Many may be bound by the confusion, but some may come. As the gospels revealed, the Kingdom of Heaven will rejoice for a single soul saved.

To the atheists and the agnostics, the work of a Christian is not to intellectually force people to accept the Word. The Word is like fuel to a spirit that is ready to ignite. First, the atheists and agnostics should be given knowledge of the Word whether or not they see it as the truth. Then as they are placed in God's hands, Christians must be ready to help them understand the work of God as it takes hold of them. The Lord will work on the ones who are of the right spiritual quality.

The real opponent of the Christians is not other religions or people who are still spiritually immature. It is the wave of false prophets that has descended on the world through the guidance of Satan. They use the name of Jesus but teach a perversion of the truth in the Bible. Any group that does not encourage its people to read the Bible slowly, carefully, and completely is not a Christian group. Any group that does not encourage its people to reach out to God in prayer and accept His gift of the Holy Spirit is not a Christian group. Any group that denies that Jesus will descend with the army of Heaven on His day is not a Christian group. As the completion of God's plan approaches, every road that a Christian takes will be mined with the work of the false prophets. Many will be lost to these false prophets. Christians must journey into these dens of perversion and rescue as many as they can. Many will hate Christians because of these false prophets. Christians must endure all the false accusations while delivering the true Word. A Christian in this battle against the false prophets must be spiritually prepared. A Christian who still has doubts better avoid the battle for he might lose himself to the evil.

In the early days, Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. Therefore, we should go out into the world in teams. This is especially important when we are coming face to face with the works of Satan.

As Christians look upon this world with so many people consumed with worldly pleasures and so distant from spiritual birth, we may be filled with the desire to change the world through our own powers. This desire may increase for Christians in a democratic society where such powers appear attainable. Before any Christian races off to take this deceptive power, he should think about several things. First, the idea of a Christian nation in this world is a myth that cannot come true. A Christian nation must open its borders so that all who wish to seek shelter are welcome. A Christian nation must offer all it can in food and supplies to feed the hungry and to stop the pain around the world. A Christian nation does not fight for territory, for no land is worth the price of human lives. A Christian nation would be the poorest and gentlest nation. It would be a nation that probably could not survive and has no place in this world. When God wanted to purify His chosen people, He did not give them a powerful nation because power corrupts. Instead, He took that kingdom away from them and placed them without worldly power in Babylon where they were free to worship.

Democracy is not a Christian concept. A Christian's rightful ruler is God and Jesus, and the belief that men have the right to choose their own rulers is a sign of arrogance. The perfect kingdom is one ruled by Jesus. The next perfect kingdom is one ruled by a loving king chosen by the Lord, such as David. In fact, the Lord selects all the rulers of this world, good and evil alike, for He controls or permits all events. He uses the good and rewards them, and He uses the evil and destroys them as He destroyed the King of Assyria. Unfortunately, because the world is so corrupted, the Lord would not place many good people in such positions of corruption.

If democracy is not a Christian concept, then what is it? Democracy is the best form of government for Christians in a non-Christian world. This is because democracy generally creates the greatest degree of freedom for people, even though such freedom

is based on people's inability to agree and individual desires. Freedom is the power that God granted to the spirit of man so that it can burst into life. Freedom is the physical environment in which Christianity can be best spread.

The corruption of democracy, however, is that it offers people, even Christians, a false sense of power. To reach for this power, Christians may lose themselves to the matters of this world which enslave. Christians might say that they seek power to enact laws and build a Christian way of life. This is indeed a very dangerous path, for we know that laws bring death. If a person's life is overwhelmed by the laws of man, he will be denied the spiritual choices that bring him closer to God. People must be allowed to choose between good and evil, not because of worldly punishment but because of love for God. If Christians want to create laws and live by laws, then all the laws that God gave to Moses must be adopted. Christians cannot selectively enforce Old Testament laws such as those punishing certain sexual behaviors because such actions offend them, and neglect laws about the tithe, Sabbath, diet, and other things because they are too weak to meet them. A Christian should think about the fact that God often allows people to go far away from Him so that they can come to Him in force. All their past sins are then forgiven. The tax collector and Mary Magdelene are some biblical examples. A Christian should also think about the fact that if God never wanted Christians to be exposed to sins and temptations, then He would never have created the world this way. A Christian's triumph is to walk through all temptations and grow spiritually. Yet, if Christians know that someone will fall to temptation, they must lead that person away, and a Christian must not intentionally take part in tempting others. As in the Lord's prayer, we should ask God to reduce the testing of us and our fellow man. This then raises the question if a temptation is so powerful that it will corrupt everyone, should Christians make a compromise with ideals and enact laws to block it? This decision can only be made individually with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If the power of democracy is not for the creation of a Christian kingdom, what might be the correct Christian attitudes toward it? A democracy is a gift from God so that Christians are free to grow.

Therefore, Christians should participate in a democracy to the extent that such freedom, especially the freedom to worship, is preserved. A democracy generally protects the life of each individual, for each individual is counted as he is treasured by God. Therefore, Christians should support a democracy in its effort to ensure that people are not harmed. If Christians fail in this environment, then a democracy is a punishment from God. The same fertile land of freedom shall be given to people who oppose Christianity and are consumed by this world. Then, no number of Christian laws can make the land right. The people will rise up in freedom and make the churches into empty husks. The land will then be dotted with lifeless monuments as a testimony to Christians' failure. As in the days of Solomon, Christians too tend to fail when God grants great prosperity.

The world that Christians must face in the years to come will be more challenging than ever before. Thousands of years ago God broke apart mankind because people were united without God. Now after thousands of years of conflict as well as finding each other, mankind is starting to come together again. Unfortunately this time it is still without God. The heart of this unification is not love, not even love for one another. Instead, mankind is uniting to feed the worldly desires to increase trade, to make profit. To feed greed, we have detached money from the labor that justifies it. Instead, through stocks, bonds, currency, and commodities trading, we have created a world where people live for the sake of money. For thousands of years humanity lived in simplicity. Then in less than two hundred years the world was transformed by technology. Technology is what breaks down the distances that God has placed between people. First, the people of this world are linked by physical transportation, and now the people of this world are being linked by telecommunications. While people will still fight, no one can deny that the world is truly becoming one again.

As the world turns away from God, Christians must stand firm. The ways of Satan are filled with deceit. The world might lure Christians to join them and be prosperous. The world might tell Christians, "what harm can there be in not recognizing God in public if there is peace." The world might say that it is religion that has

caused all the wars and killing in the past. The world might say that it is the right of private companies to ban religious practices on their properties and for their employees. Apartments might become religion-free instead of smoke-free. The world might say that displaying a symbol of one's faith in public is an offense to others. The world might say that Christians are gathering to plot against the government. In the end, the world might put Christians to trial as criminals against a peace-loving state. In the end, the world might put Christians to death as humanity looks on and cheers. Even the family and loved ones of Christians may turn against them and look upon them with disgust. Against all this, Christians must stand firm. Many Christians may want to die in Jesus' name. However, the Lord has chosen the correct time for each of us and knows when our work will be done. Therefore, Christians must want life so that they can fight against evil. On those last days, God will shake the world. Some might then repent and seek God. Christians must be there to welcome them. When each Christian's work is done, he must let go of his life so that the Lord can receive him.

In fighting against evil, Christians may wonder whether they can kill. This question can only be answered with the help of the Holy Spirit and by looking deeply into the quality of one's own spirit. For the Israelites in the days of Moses, killing was a matter of human nature as with all men. Therefore, their objective was to kill justly with the permission or even by the command of God. After thousands of years of maturation, many of us today may find any kind of killing to be a horrible act. If this is the nature of our spirits then perhaps we should not kill. If we find killing horrible because we see this physical life as having value beyond all else, then we may be enslaved by this world. The horror in killing is that we have taken an action which denied someone the opportunity for spiritual growth in this world. Life is a precious gift from God, and only God has the right to end it. While all actions, even killing, are allowed by God, if we do not act in accordance with God's will, then our salvation may be jeopardized.

The situations in which a Christian might think about killing fall into two categories. First, the Lord has declared that He shall send famine, war, disease, and wild animals to punish people. As

the prophets of old pleaded with the Lord for the forgiveness of people, Christians should also pray for mercy on others. The Lord permits suffering but teaches Christians to relieve it out of love for their fellow man. Therefore, Christians should fight to stop these plagues. A Christian should think about feeding others in times of famine, making peace in times of war, healing people when diseases strike, and perhaps killing wild animals when they threaten. As we look upon the world, maybe the wild animals are not the lions and tigers, but the criminals and psychopaths in our society. If this is true, then indeed the Lord has sent an ever-growing wave of wild animals into the world. Therefore, the first situation in which a Christian might consider killing with the guidance of the Holy Spirit is to protect the life of the weak and innocent.

The second situation in which Christians might consider fighting, even killing, is when the world has turned to persecute them. Jesus told His disciples to take swords for protection when they journey into the world after He has ascended. In situations of persecution a Christian should fight only if guided by the Holy Spirit. Christians should never fight because they are afraid to die and want to cling to life. The gift of life is more precious for those distant to God. So a Christian must hesitate before taking any action that might end such life. When Jesus' time came, He surrendered peacefully. When the apostles' time came, they too surrendered in the name of Jesus. When the end comes to Christians during the last days, killing others will not save them but rob others of their time on earth. No one can fight against the world except through Jesus and God. Therefore, as the world stands up against Christians, Christians should think about keeping themselves pure and not staining their hands with the blood of others.

All the prophecies of the Bible point to the fact that time is growing short for this world of man. God's plan is coming to its perfect completion. Yet, there is still so much work that must be done with the permission of God. Everyday on the order of 200,000 people die in this world. We must ask how many who are to die tomorrow could receive the Word in this life to save their souls. With God's guidance we must endeavor harder to deliver the good news of Jesus. As the turmoil of the final days arrives, Christians must diligently

listen for the calling from God. Every time we are called we must race to meet the work without hesitation. We must go where the Lord sends us. We must do whatever the Lord commands. Time is growing short, and there is no room for procrastination or doubt.

CONCLUSION

This disciple sincerely hopes that these words from the heart have been of help to you in stimulating your desire to seek the truth in the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit. If you are in opposition to Christian beliefs, please do not be offended by the strength of our conviction as expressed in this book. We as Christians speak in power because we love, care, and know that all of us atheists, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians - are one as the tree of humanity. We pray that every branch of humanity grows stronger under the love of God. We weep when branches die spiritually and must be trimmed.

In final thought, let us return to when history began thousands of years ago, when God revealed Himself to Moses and all of us for all times. What Moses saw on Mount Sinai was truly the meaning to everything. Moses saw a bush that may very well symbolize humanity with all its true branches. God spoke out from the center of the bush, and the bush was consumed by a flame that does not destroy, the flame of the Holy Spirit. From the flame and the bush rose the one true angel of the Lord, the angel who spoke with the authority of the Lord, the angel that is Christ. This is how the Holy Bible began, with the Lord telling Moses the secrets to all things. The Bible concludes with a great prophecy, one that assures us that what Moses saw will be realized. The tree of humanity shall be fully grown with the angels in Heaven resting upon it. If you can only believe in one thing, then please believe that God's plan for the growth of humanity will be fulfilled and that there will be a New Heaven and New Earth.

The relationship between a writer and his readers is one of special closeness. Through these many pages we have taken a unique journey together. I pray that all of you will journey onward far beyond the inadequate words of this disciple and become shining champions of Jesus Christ. In the days to come, I shall endeavor to stand with you, my brothers and sisters, to do the work

that must be done. Please pray for me as I shall pray for you. Let us all be one in the light of the Lord. Let the strength and purity of our spirits remain firm to the final day. Let us rejoice: The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Amen.

REFERENCES TO THE HOLY BIBLE

(\) = divides different biblical discussions

(,) = divides same subject repeated in the Bible

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1. John 6:26
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