

# TODAY'S THOUGHTS



VOLUME 1  
Second Edition

WILLIAM E. WRIGHT

# **Today's Thoughts**

**Volume 1**  
Second Edition

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William E. Wright

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Doctrinal Ministries  
Houston, Texas

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**For God so loved the world that He gave His only  
begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should  
not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16**

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Great Horned Owl, Lake Whitney State Park, Texas

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## Preface

In this Second Edition of Volume 1 of *Today's Thoughts*, I have revised and updated the Bible study devotionals that were included in the original first edition. I have also added a few new devotionals.

A few years ago I began writing almost daily devotionals and emailing them to family members. The email list expanded over time to include additional family members and a small number of friends. When my birthday came, my daughter and grandsons surprised me with printed copies of over five months of devotionals in book form. They had printed enough copies for the members of the email list. Some of the devotionals in that original Volume 1 of *Today's Thoughts* have been included in the subsequent volumes and I have added some new devotionals in this second edition of Volume 1.

These devotionals are written for people who have trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. As the apostle John wrote near the end of his gospel in John 20:31, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." One hundred times in his gospel, John repeated this message in one way or another. John's stated purpose for writing this gospel was that we might believe in Jesus Christ. He gives no other condition for receiving God's gift of eternal life than faith in Jesus Christ.

Now as a believer in Jesus Christ I must learn how I should live. This is a lot more than a few moral do's and don't's, which we were taught when we grew up. We need to let God's word permeate our thinking so that all our thoughts, words, and actions reflect the way God wants us to live. In the four volumes of *Today's Thoughts* I have included devotionals from every book of the Bible. I have tried to understand what the authors were saying and how their original readers would have understood what the authors wrote. I briefly describe the context of the chosen verses and then from there write the devotional or application part.

Twenty-five to thirty percent of the Bible is prophecy. God wants us to know what He has prepared for us in the future. God's future plans can be a comfort and an encouragement as we face the problems and difficulties of life. These devotionals include my understanding of these biblical prophecies based on a normal literal reading of the text. I have not tried to find some hidden figurative or allegorical meaning in the prophetic texts.

In the original Volume 1 of *Today's Thoughts*, my daughter included some bird photographs which I had taken and sent to her. I have continued to include photos of birds, butterflies and few animals in each volume I have published. I have been interested in birds since the seventh grade of school in 1950. I have taken all of these photographs.

I pray that these devotionals will be a blessing and a challenge to each person reading them, as they have been to me.



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Job 19:25-27. For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. *How* my heart yearns within me!

The book of Job tells the story of a man in whose life everything was going wrong. His children had all been killed. His livestock and crops had been destroyed. His servants had all been killed. Then he was inflicted with painful boils that covered his body. This book answers the question for us, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” These verses today also can teach us what God has given us to handle suffering in our lives.

Most Bible teachers believe that Job may have been the first book of the Bible to be written. We don’t know who the author was. The events in Job could have occurred about the time of Abraham.

Gen. 3:15 is considered the first prophecy of a future Savior when it says “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” Similarly, Job 19:25 gives us the first mention of a future resurrection. “For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth.”

What did Job mean when he said, “Redeemer”? *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says this:

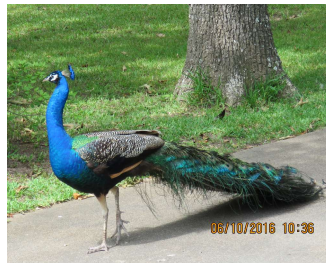
“He (Job) knew that only God could vindicate his innocence. Job would die, but God lives on as his Defender, Protector, or Vindicator (gō’ēl, ‘a person who defended or avenged the cause of another, or who provided protection or legal aid for a close relative who could not do so for himself.”

Job is using the word “Redeemer” from the standpoint that John used the word “Advocate” in 1 John 2:1, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Job’s friends were telling Job that because of everything that had happened to him, he had to have done something wrong. God was punishing him.

Job expects to die; but he knows that his “Redeemer lives.” His Redeemer “shall stand at last on the earth” and vindicate Job, that he had not done anything wrong. Job understands that his Redeemer is God, for he says, “That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (not another god or another man will speak on Job’s behalf).

Job sees God as omniscient. God knows all the facts. Job does not know why he is suffering, but God knows. Actually, Job 1-2 begins with a behind the scenes view of what is going on in God’s throne room. As Rev. 12:10 says of Satan, “the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night.” In the beginning chapters of Job, Satan is condemning Job before God. Most of my suffering comes from my own mistakes or because of what is happening in the world around me. But Job was Satan’s target. Job expresses his confidence that his Redeemer God would in the end confirm that Job had not done anything to bring Job’s suffering on himself.

Job did not have God’s written word, but he did have knowledge of God and expresses his faith in God. God has told us in His word, the Bible, what the future holds for us. God expects me to learn and to know His word, so that it can be a comfort and an encouragement to me and I can glorify Him.



Indian Peacock, Houston, Texas

Psa. 16:8-11. I have set the LORD always before me; Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

Both Peter and Paul quoted from this passage in sermons recorded in the book of Acts. Peter did so on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:25-28. When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul, preaching in the Jewish synagogue, quoted from this passage as recorded in Acts 13:35-37. “You will not leave my soul in Sheol.” David knew that one day he would die. But he also believed that dying was not the end. God would not leave him in the place of the dead. I take it that David uses the word “Sheol” simply as a reference to “the grave.” David knows he will die, after which will come a time of his future resurrection.

“You will show me the path of life. In Your presence *is* fullness of joy.” God showing David “the path of life,” could be taken as God guiding David during the time of his life on earth. But when read in the context of this statement, it should be understood as a reference to David’s future resurrection to eternal life from the place of the dead, called here, “Sheol.” In Acts 2 it is transliterated from the Greek as “Hades.”

I see some lessons God wants me to know in these verses. First, David wrote, “I have set the LORD always before me, Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.” Does God have first place in my life? It is all too easy to forget about prayer, to skip the time I have set aside for reading and meditating on God’s word. As Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” This is more than just before meals, going to bed and on Sunday in church. I like to think of these as quick, bullet prayers throughout the day. My wife and I like to pray for safety every time either of us or both of us get into the car to drive somewhere.

Read again what Moses commanded the people of Israel in Deut. 6:6-7. “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” To me, that suggests something more than just a hour or so at a Sunday morning pep rally

We also have the words of Joshua when he was leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land after forty years in the wilderness. Jos. 1 8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

In the New Testament Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 1:2-3, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” In the Bible God has given us His plan for this world from the beginning of creation in Gen. 1:1 through our final destiny in eternity of Rev. 21-22. Knowing and understanding God’s word shapes our thinking so that we will think, say, and do what God wants us to think, say and do in every situation we face in life.

Every day I face new challenges. How do I react? Do I fall back on my sinful nature? Or do I follow the leading of the Holy Spirit through what God’s word says? I can only do the latter to the extent that I know what God’s word says.

David faced many difficult times in his life. He fought with Goliath. He had to flee from Saul when Saul was determined to kill David. David’s son Absalom rebelled against him and took over the kingdom. In today’s verses David could say, “Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.” The Lord delivered David, so he could go on to say, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices.”

Psa. 22:1-5. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? *Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?* O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. But You *are* holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.”

This is a psalm of David. Did he write this about some event in his own life? The New Testament quotes many verses in this psalm as prophetic of the sufferings Jesus experienced on our behalf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says this about Psalm 22. “No known incident in the life of David fits the details of this psalm. The expressions describe an execution, not an illness; yet that execution is more appropriate to Jesus’ crucifixion than David’s experience. ... David used many poetic expressions to portray his immense sufferings, but these poetic words became literally true of the sufferings of Jesus Christ at His enemies’ hands. ... It is primarily the account of a righteous man who was being put to death by wicked men.” Nothing that we know of David’s life fits the descriptions of suffering expressed in this psalm. But the descriptions fit well with Jesus’ sufferings.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” When Jesus was on the cross, He spoke these same words (Mark 15:34). Paul wrote about Jesus in 2 Cor. 5:21, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us.”

Jesus told His disciples in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Jesus was describing the sinless perfection of His life, in that He overcame every challenge the world presented to Him. This is something that I can never do. All too often, I find myself failing in the challenges of living in this world.

Heb. 2:9 says of Jesus, “that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Death is a separation. I don’t think we can fully realize what Jesus was saying when he cried out these words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” But when God imputed our sins (and that includes my sins) to Jesus, this created a separation between the humanity of Jesus and God.

Heb. 5:7-9 is not easy to understand; but it gives us important information about Jesus and His suffering and death. “Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, *yef* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” How did God answer Jesus’ prayer? God did not save Jesus in the sense that He did not have to suffer and die for us, but God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection was the way that God answered Jesus’ prayer. The result is that by Jesus bearing our sins in His own body on the cross, we can receive eternal salvation by obeying Jesus’ message to believe in Him.

“Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them.” David recalls the faith of the people of Israel when they followed Moses. With Pharaoh’s army coming up behind them, they crossed the sea on dry land. When Pharaoh’s army followed, the sea returned to its place and the army drowned.

Reading Exo. 14:18, it sounds like this resulted in a great revival among the remaining people of Egypt. “Then the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have gained honor for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” Not only that, but this story was told throughout the world. We know that Rahab in Jericho heard it and trusted in the LORD. Many others undoubtedly did also.

I see this world moving farther away from God. May I learn to trust God more in the problems and difficulties that I will face as the current trends continue.

Psa. 22:14-18. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look *and* stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.

The verses in this psalm written by David appear to use hyperbolic language to describe David’s situation. Two times in David’s life, he had to flee. The first time was when King Saul was pursuing David with his army. The second time occurred after David was king in Israel and his son, Absalom, led a rebellion to overthrow David as king. David had to flee from Jerusalem. In both situations, David and his mighty men and his small army were outnumbered by their opponents. In both situations, David could see no human solution.

In 1 Sam. 24 when David had the opportunity to kill Saul and put a human end to his troubles, all he did was cut off a corner of Saul’s robe! He knew that killing Saul would be breaking God’s law. The lesson here for me is that even as David knew and obeyed God’s written word in his time, I should do the same today.

In Psa. 22:19-21 David turns to prayer. In Psa. 22:19 David prays, “But you, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My strength, hasten to help Me!” At the end of Psa. 22:21 David tells us that God answered his prayer. “You have answered Me.” In these situations in David’s life, God brought him through Saul’s attempt to kill David and Absalom’s rebellion.

Psa. 22:22-31 ends with a praise to God for David’s deliverance. In this praise there is a view to the future. Psa. 22:27-28 tells us what is yet to come. “All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom *is* the LORD’s, And He rules over the nations.” God chose Abraham and through him, Israel, was to be a witness to the world for God. The whole world was to learn about God through Israel.

What I have just said above is how a person in David’s time would have understood this psalm. But the hyperbolic language provides a vivid description of death by crucifixion. Warren Wiersbe wrote the following in his book on the Psalms, *Be Worshipful*:

Then David looked within and saw himself (vv. 14–18), and the description is surely that of a man being crucified. He is stripped of his clothing, placed on a cross, and nails are driven through his hands and feet. As he hangs between heaven and earth, his body is dehydrated, intense thirst takes over, and the end of it all is “the dust of death” (v. 15; see Gen. 3:19; Job 7:21; 10:9; 17:16; Eccl. 3:20). Like ebbing water and melting wax, his strength fades away, and he becomes like a brittle piece of broken pottery. (For the application to Jesus, see Matt. 27:35, Mark 14:24, Luke 23:34, and John 19:23–24, 28.) It is remarkable David should describe crucifixion because it was not a Jewish means of capital punishment, and it’s unlikely that he ever saw it occur. David, the prophetic psalmist (Acts 2:30), saw what would happen to Messiah centuries later.

Psa. 22 is an example of how the Holy Spirit, the divine author of Scripture, worked through the human authors, using their own words to describe their present situation, to teach us about future events. While most of this psalm looks toward Jesus’ first coming, Psa. 22:27-28 looks to His Second Advent. “All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom *is* the LORD’s, And He rules over the nations.”

Psa. 46:1-3. God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; *Though* its waters roar *and* be troubled, *Though* the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah

Psalm 46 was a favorite psalm of Martin Luther. It formed the basis for the hymn he wrote, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” The words give us encouragement as we face the many struggles and crises of this life. It begins, “God is our refuge and strength.” When we face the storms of life, God is our shelter.

“A very present help in trouble.” Our God is omnipresent. He is present everywhere we go. He is also present at all times. God is not bound by time as we are. When trouble comes, God is with me to help.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” Paul wrote this after writing in 2 Tim. 3:10-11, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.” So the psalmist wrote, “Therefore we will not fear.” As the Lord delivered Paul so I can find my refuge and shelter in God’s promises.

The psalmist illustrates his point with a hyperbolic description of worst case natural disasters. “Even though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; *Though* its waters roar *and* be troubled, *Though* the mountains shake with its swelling.” This is not as bad as what God allowed Satan to do in testing Job.

Many times our trials do not come from natural disasters, but come from other people. In his second letter to Timothy Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.”

The Bible gives us many promises that I can apply in tough situations:

1 Pet. 5:7. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

1 Cor. 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.”

God provides for us so we can handle every situation that comes our way. But too often we try to solve our problems our own way. Israel was prone to doing this. God warned the people of Israel in Isa. 30:1-2, “Woe to the rebellious children,” says the LORD, ‘Who take counsel, but not of Me, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin; Who walk to go down to Egypt, And have not asked My advice, To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, And to trust in the shadow of Egypt!’” We may go to human counselors because we have not learned God’s word ourselves. Many human counselors are well trained in the ways of the world, but how much of God’s word do they know?

“Who take counsel, but not of Me.” Have we prayed about the trials we are facing. James wrote about dealing with trials in James 1:5-6, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with “no doubting.” Wisdom is the ability to apply God’s word to the situation. But if I don’t know God’s word, then there is no sound basis on which the Holy Spirit can provide wisdom. Also I have to correctly understand what God’s word says and to have faith in it, i.e. to believe what God has said. “Let him ask in faith.”

Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 1:2-3, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue.” It is our knowing of God’s word that allows us to deal with all things pertaining to life and godliness.



Psa. 46:4-7. *There is* a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy *place* of the tabernacle of the Most High. God *is* in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah

Psalms 46 is a psalm of encouragement. How do we handle the problems and difficulties of life? We are not told specifically what the problems were that Israel was facing which resulted in the writing of this psalm. Warren Wiersbe related it to a major national crisis the Southern Kingdom of Judah faced during the reign of Hezekiah and God’s miraculous deliverance. Assyria had successfully conquered the Northern Kingdom and carried them into captivity. Judah and Jerusalem were to be next. The Assyrian army was besieging Jerusalem and the situation did not look good. The descriptions given in this section of the psalm would seem to fit.

“*There is* a river whose stream shall make glad the city of God.” This “city of God” would be Jerusalem. Unlike most cities of the ancient world, Jerusalem was not located on a river. But King Hezekiah had built an underground water system that connected the Spring of Gihon in Kidron with the Pool of Siloam inside Jerusalem. Jerusalem had water.

“The holy *place* of the tabernacle of the Most High”. Solomon’s Temple was in Jerusalem and was God’s dwelling place.

“God *is* in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.” Isaiah was there prophesying to Hezekiah, encouraging him and the people to trust God and not to seek help from Egypt or others. Hezekiah listened to Isaiah and encouraged the people. 2 Kings 19:35 tells us what happened. “And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.” As the psalm says, “just at the break of dawn,” Jerusalem woke up to find the besieging army lying dead on the ground.

With the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem, Judah’s situation was totally hopeless. But as Psa. 46:7 says, “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.” in this case the word “refuge” is more than just a shelter or a hiding place as in Psa. 46:1. This is a different word often translated “fortress.” If the Lord can deliver Jerusalem in this hopeless situation, He can certainly bring me through any of the challenges I might face.

For us today, we need to remember: “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.” I need to learn and apply God’s many promises from His word. I need to build up my faith that God has every thing under control. He will deliver me from the problems and difficulties I face.



Tropical Checkered-Skipper, butterfly, near Livingston, Texas

Psa. 46:6-7. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah

Psa. 46:8-11. Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah

This section of the psalm has prophetic overtones. Psa. 46:6 says, “The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.” Psalm 2 looking forward to the return and reign of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus, begins with the nations raging.

Psa. 2:1-3, “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, ‘Let us break their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’” This looks forward to the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the Great Tribulation.

“The earth melted.” Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 3:10, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

Then Peter adds in 2 Pet. 3:12-13. “Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” The day is coming when the present heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire. The present earth will be destroyed. We will then spend eternity in the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21-22.

These are future events. We know from the New Testament that the next prophetic event to occur is the Rapture of the Church which Jesus taught in John 14:1-3. The Rapture was totally unknown in the Old Testament. Israel was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah who would establish God’s kingdom.

The psalmist here in Psa. 46:8 writes of the Lord, “Who has made desolations in the earth.” To me this sounds like the time of the Great Tribulation which follows the Rapture.

Then in Psa. 46:9. “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire.” This sounds like the establishment of the Kingdom which we know from Rev. 20 is the 1,000 year Millennium. Jesus, the Messiah, is ruling over all the world and Israel is in peace in their Promised Land. “Be still, and know that I *am* God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Rev. 20:7-8 says that at the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is released and leads one last final rebellion against God. But God had not yet revealed this part of His plan to the psalmist.

For us today, this psalm is an encouragement to us as believers. The psalmist concludes: “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.” I need to build up my faith that God has every thing under control. He will deliver me from the problems and difficulties I face.

I am also reminded of a verse that has been a favorite of mine for many years. Rom. 8:31. “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can* be against us.”

Psa. 118:5-9. I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a broad place. The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I shall see *my desire* on those who hate me. *It is* better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man. *It is* better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.

I learned a bit of Bible trivia from my wife the other day. Then I confirmed it in Thomas Constable’s *Notes*. Dr. Constable quoted a reference to a statement by Spurgeon that said that Psa. 118:8 is the middle verse of the Bible. “*It is* better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.” This is an important principle that we all should learn. This verse is short and easy to memorize. At some point in time even the best of our friends are going to disappoint us or hurt us in some way. “*It is* better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.”

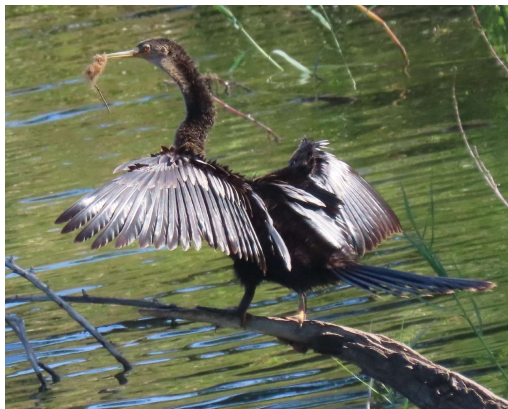
Psa. 118:9 tells us that the same is true of those who rule over us. “*It is* better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.” Our government leaders and elected officials are not perfect. They will make mistakes. Some of them will do more so than others, But until Jesus Christ returns and establishes the promised kingdom for Israel and His rule over all the world, we will not have a perfect president, king or ruler.

This is a psalm of praise to the Lord. The psalm begins in Psa. 118:1 and ends in Psa. 118:29 the same way: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD for *He is* good! For His mercy endures *forever*.” Some think that the psalm was written for the dedication of the restored walls and gates of Jerusalem in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah after the return of a remnant from the Babylonian captivity.

In 2 Tim. 3:12-13, Paul warned Christian believers of all times of what it means to walk faithfully in obedience to God’s word. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” We all face times in our lives when everything seems to go wrong. How do we handle them? Today’s passage, Psa. 118:5 begins, “I called on the LORD in my distress.” When things go wrong in my life, what is my “knee-jerk” reaction? Is it anger or panic? Does my mind start running through rapid thoughts of how to solve the mess? The psalmist says, “I called on the LORD in my distress.” He adds a truth from God’s word, “The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

Why does Paul follow the warning about believers facing persecution with a statement about evil men and impostors ... deceiving and being deceived? The solutions the world offers for our distresses and difficulties are often wrong. God’s word has all the answers I need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

The apostle Peter, in a passage commanding us to “humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God,” concludes with the well-known verse 1 Pet. 5:7, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” My pride and arrogance tell me that I can work out the solutions to any problem that comes my way. Peter tells me differently. I am to cast my care upon the Lord. I am to call on Him in my distress.



Anhinga, Brownsville, Texas

Psa. 118:22-26. The stone *which* the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing; It *is* marvelous in our eyes. This *is* the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

“The stone *which* the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.” This psalm may have been written at the time following the return of a remnant from the Babylonian captivity. This was in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. They were rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem and the Temple. There may actually have been a stone that they had tried to use in the rebuilding that was set aside because it didn’t fit. Then, later, they used this stone as the principal cornerstone, perhaps in the Temple.

These verses are quoted several times in the New Testament. In Matt. 21:9, at the time of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the people shouted Psa. 118:26, “Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD!” Later in Matt. 21:42 when Jesus finishes teaching a parable of an absentee landowner and the unfaithful tenants, Jesus quoted Psa. 118:22-23. The chief priests and Pharisees correctly understood that Jesus was quoting these verses about themselves.

Looking at how Jesus used these verses and the Jewish leaders’ understanding of what Jesus said, Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected. The builders are the chief priests and Pharisees. In Matt. 21:43, Jesus says, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” The Jews had lost the opportunity of seeing Jesus bring in the promised Kingdom in their day. The fulfillment of the Old Testament Kingdom promises is yet to be fulfilled.

The imagery the psalmist gives us is important. The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus as their Messiah during Jesus’ first advent. But this rejected Stone will still become the chief cornerstone. Jesus goes on to tell the Jews in Matt. 23:39 when Israel’s promised Kingdom will happen. He says, “for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Jesus quotes Psa. 118:25. The Kingdom will be restored to the Jews when they finally acknowledge Jesus as their Savior and Messiah.

Paul wrote the three chapters in Romans 9-11 to tell us that God would restore the Kingdom to Israel. He wrote in Rom. 11:26-27: “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is my covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’” To the apostle Paul, the promise of the Kingdom that God had promised in the past to Israel still remained to be fulfilled.

God did not give us prophecies to tickle our fancies about what will happen in the future. Psalm 118 provided encouragement to Jews returning from Babylon as they faced antagonism from their neighbors. After Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the future Rapture of the Church, he told them in 1 Thess. 4:18, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” Jesus told His disciples in the Upper Room about the future and said in John 14:27, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” He concluded these remarks to the disciples in John 16:31, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

We can see from the way God has fulfilled prophecies in the past, that He will continue to fulfill all the prophecies He has given us. We can see that God is in control and nothing catches Him off guard or by surprise. God also expects us to know and understand the prophecies He has given us. When we do, they will be a comfort and encouragement to us when we face the difficulties and problems of living in this world.

Isa. 7:14. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

This is a magnificent prophecy of the future birth of Jesus, my Savior, and Israel’s Messiah. Judah was under threat of invasion by an alliance between Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah’s king, Ahaz, was an apostate king. Instead of trusting in the Lord to protect himself and Judah, he made an alliance with Assyria. Isaiah comes into the picture and challenges Ahaz. The message for Ahaz was that he should place his trust in the Lord, not in worldly alliances. Isaiah told Ahaz that within 65 years, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, would be destroyed.

In Isa. 7:11-12, Isaiah delivers a command from the Lord. “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” The purpose of the sign was to be a demonstration to Ahaz that Isaiah was prophesying the truth about the destruction that was to come to Syria and Israel. Ahaz said that he would not ask for a sign with this pious answer in Isa. 7:12, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!” He did not believe in the Lord and certainly wasn’t going to pay attention to what Isaiah was saying. So Isaiah told Ahaz, “the Lord Himself will give you a sign.” The reason that he did not ask for a sign was that he did not want to believe Isaiah.

2 Kings 16:2-3 says this about Ahaz: “Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do *what* was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David *had done*. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel.”

Bible teachers argue back and forth about the significance of this prophetic sign. Was Isaiah indicating that a young, unmarried woman would marry and have a son and that this birth would be the sign to Ahaz of the accuracy of Isaiah’s prophecy that in 65 years the Northern Kingdom would be gone? Or was Isaiah prophesying only about the virgin birth of Jesus?

Ahaz refused to believe Isaiah’s prophecy about the destruction of Syria and Israel by the Assyrians. Instead he made his own alliance with Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9) continuing to disobey God. The Bible does not record that a young woman at this time married and had a son named Immanuel in fulfillment of the sign Isaiah gave to Ahaz. Whether that happened or not is moot because of Ahaz’s continued refusal to obey God.

Today Matt. 1:22-23 tells us that this prophecy pointed to the future birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah. The prophecy was literally fulfilled by Jesus’ birth. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, not only as fully human, but He also was God.

The Assyrians did indeed conquer Israel. They then invaded Judah and under Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, God miraculously delivered Judah from destruction. Hezekiah did not follow in his father’s steps in rejecting the Lord. Because of Hezekiah’s faith in God, the future destruction by Babylon was delayed. For me today, this is a reminder of the importance of faithfully walking with the Lord: Learning His word and obeying Him.



Eastern Kingbird, Wharton County, Texas

Isa. 9:6-7. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Isaiah gives us another prophecy of Israel’s coming Messiah.

“A Child is born.” The Messiah would be born as a member of mankind. Jesus Christ was truly human. “A Son is given.” the Messiah is the Son of God in that He also possesses all the attributes of deity. Jesus as the second Person of the Trinity has been God from all eternity, along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. These three Persons comprise one God. They all share the same attributes. Jesus through the virgin birth became true humanity, but without a sin nature. He is fully God and full humanity in one Person forever. This is the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

“The government will be upon His shoulder.” The Messiah will rule, in total control over His kingdom. Mic. 5:2 gives a similar prophecy: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.” Zech. 14:9 adds another dimension to Messiah’s rule. He will rule over the entire world. “And the LORD shall be king over all the earth, In that day it shall be—‘The LORD *is* one,’ And His name one.”

“His name will be called Wonderful.” The noun form of this word is used twelve times in the Old Testament. At least ten of those times, it describes the wonderful works of God. Jud. 13:18 uses the word with a one letter suffix identifying the Angel of the Lord by the name of Wonderful. The verse reads, “And the Angel of the LORD said to him, ‘Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?’”

“Counselor.” The Messiah’s advice is far beyond that of human wisdom. Isa. 2:3, tells us, “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’” This is looking forward to the time of the Millennium, the time of the promised Kingdom of Israel.

“Mighty God.” God is omnipotent. So is Israel’s Messiah. “Everlasting Father.” The Messiah possesses the same essence of eternity that God does. The Messiah has always existed and will continue to exist forever. “Prince of Peace.” When the Messiah reigns in the future, this will be a time of peace. “Upon the throne of David.” God promised David that the Messiah would be David’s descendant.

“The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” God keeps His word. I can trust in God because He is faithful. I look forward to the time when Jesus Christ will establish His Kingdom. There will be no more wars and rumors (news reports) of wars. The nation Israel will be a part of this future rule of Jesus Christ as Israel’s Messiah.



**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Houston, Texas**

Isa. 11:10-12. "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious." It shall come to pass in that day *That* the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, And will assemble the outcasts of Israel, And gather together the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.

The New Testament clearly teaches that there is no prophecy that needs to be fulfilled prior to the return of Christ for His Church. The next prophetic event for which we are told to look is the descent of Jesus from heaven when we will be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Isaiah wrote this Old Testament prophecy about Israel’s future. God will regather the people of Israel who are scattered throughout the world into the promised land. The prophecies in the Old Testament are all about the Messiah and Israel. Isaiah 11-12 is talking about the future reign of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, over the entire world during the Millennium.

In Isa. 12:1 Isaiah is still talking about the same prophetic event when he again writes “And in that day you will say: ‘O LORD, I will praise You.’” The regathered people of Israel will then have faith in their Messiah whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ, “the Root of Jesse.” As Jesus told the Jews in Matt. 23:39 “for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” When God regathers the people of Israel “again the second time,” they will be trusting in Jesus as their Messiah.

“It shall come to pass in that day ...” The day (period of time) when Jesus reigns as king over all the earth. “The LORD will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people ...” What is this about: a “second time”? When was the first? Some say the first time was the Exodus from Egypt and the second time was the return from Babylon as described in Ezra and Nehemiah. But the return we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah were not “from the four corners of the earth.” Both of these returns to the land of Israel are God’s work. The focus of Isaiah’s prophecy is on an unfulfilled second return.

What about the modern nation of Israel? Could it be this second regathering of the remnant of Israel?” While it may be a precursor, the Jewish people are not yet trusting in Jesus as their Messiah.

In 1869 Mark Twain published his second book, *The Innocents Abroad*. He describes his visit to the Holy Land which was a desolate place with few people living there. After World War 1 Palestine was set aside by International Treaty as a British Protectorate to be a homeland for the Jews. Today the nation Israel is no longer a desolate place. Close to half of the Jews in the world now live in Israel. The so-called Arab Palestinian refugees are refugees by their own choice. The Arab nations announced they were going to attack the new nation of Israel and destroy it. So the so-called Palestinian refugees chose to leave on their own.

The present nation of Israel may not be the precursor of the final end time events. History may run through this cycle again. In 1869 when Mark Twain visited the Holy Land, it would be a preposterous idea to think that Israel could ever exist again as a nation. But it has happened.

I am eagerly watching what the Lord is doing. “Lord, come quickly.”



White-winged Dove, Katy, Texas

Isa. 26:1-4. In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; *God* will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, *is* everlasting strength.

Isa. 25:2 and Isa. 26:1-2 present us with a tale of two cities. Of the first city Isa. 25:2 said, "For you have made a city a ruin, A fortified city a ruin, A palace of foreigners to be a city no more; It will never be rebuilt." Warren Wiersbe wrote in the *Bible Exposition Commentary*, "Isaiah lived in an agricultural world of towns and villages, and the large cities (or city-states) were places of power and wealth. In times of war, the people fled to the walled cities for protection." This first city is described as a generic term for all the cities of unbelievers in the world. Rev. 16:19-19:5 tells us of the destruction of the city of Babylon at the end of the Tribulation. Babylon will be the place from which the Antichrist rules the world. Rev. 18:21 summarizes this destruction. "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore."

The second city in Isa. 26 is Jerusalem from which the Messiah will rule the world during the Millennium, and the New Jerusalem of Eternity described in Rev. 21:2. The writer of Hebrews wrote of this future city in Heb. 13:14, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."

"In that day." Isaiah is looking at the future day when Israel’s Messiah will rule over the entire earth. He will reign from Jerusalem. This future day or period of time refers to the Millennium, but also includes all eternity. Jesus will rule the world from His headquarters or capital city of Jerusalem.

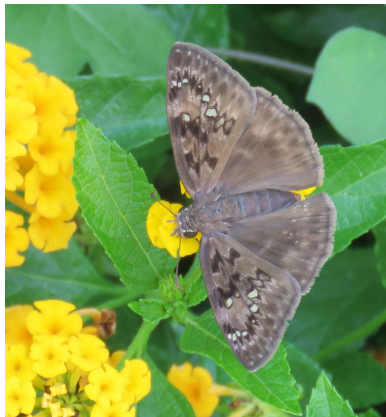
The word "salvation" is used here for deliverance. Even though Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and later by the Romans under Titus, it will be delivered again, i.e. rebuilt.

Entry into the city is reserved for those who "keep the truth." How can I know the truth unless I know God’s word?

"You will keep him in perfect peace ..." I can have an inner tranquillity in spite of all the chaos and difficulties I see around me. I must keep my eyes on the Lord and trust Him.

"Everlasting strength." My Bible footnote reads "rock of ages." So I checked other translations. Sure enough, *Young’s Literal Translation* reads "rock of ages." The *English Standard Version* says "everlasting rock." I am reminded of the hymn we sometimes sang at the Baptist church when I was growing up, "Rock of Ages." I can trust in the Lord for He is a Rock that cannot be moved. As the author of Hebrews wrote in Heb. 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

Today’s four verses begin with some heavy duty prophecy, but end with application showing why God has given us prophecy to know and understand. When Paul wrote about the Rapture of the Church in 1 Thess. 4:16-18, he finished with these words, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." Knowing Bible prophecy and correctly understanding it is an important source of comfort and peace for Christians in their walk with the Lord.



Horace’s Duskywing, butterfly, Houston, Texas



Isa. 52:13-15. Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.

Isa. 53:1-12 presents a magnificent prophetic picture of Jesus’ life, death and ultimate glorification as Israel’s Messiah. The verse and chapter breaks in the Bible help us to find certain passages, but sometimes the chapter divisions come in the middle of the author’s thoughts. Many Bible teachers have these verses in Isa. 52:13-15 as a part of the important thoughts presented in Isaiah 53. In one of my Bibles the section is labeled “The Sin-bearing Servant.”

Recently Dr. Mitch Glazer spoke at our church on Isa. 53 and he began in Isa. 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” This verse sounds like it could be speaking about Israel’s Messiah. Isaiah goes from “My God Reigns” in Isa. 52:7 to a description of the Suffering Servant” of which Isa. 53:5 says, “He was wounded for our transgressions, *He* was bruised for our iniquities ...”

Context is always important when we study the Bible. Isa. 52:13-15 provides a good transition to Isa. 53. “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” The Servant is now mentioned and is exalted. This ties the Servant back to “Your God reigns” in Isa. 52:7. But to get from verse 7 to verse 13, Isaiah tells us:

“When the LORD brings back Zion.” Isa. 52:8. This is the return of Israel from captivity to the Land.

“He has redeemed Jerusalem.” Isa. 52:9.

“All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” Isa. 52:10.

This is salvation for Gentiles.

In this passage in Isa. 52:13-15, Isaiah provides an overview of how the Servant, Israel’s Messiah, will get to the place of “Your God reigns.” After the overview Isaiah then presents more details of the process in Isa. 53:1-12.

“He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” This is the future place of this Servant. The word “Servant” is actually the word for “slave.” This is not a likely description of a prince in a royal house who is destined to become a king in the future.

“His visage (appearance) was marred more than any man.” The Servant slave will be tortured and abused.

“So He will sprinkle many nations.” The word “sprinkle” is the same word used in Lev. 1-7 where the blood of the animals sacrificed in the Tabernacle or Temple is sprinkled on the altar. “Many nations.” In Leviticus the sacrifices and sprinkling of the blood on the altar pictured the cleansing from sin, so the Servant not only cleanses Israel from their sins, but many nations, i.e. Gentiles also.

Isaiah is giving us a picture of the Servant, Israel’s Messiah” as replacing the Old Testament animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ died as our substitute that those who believe in Him may have eternal life. This suffering Servant is not only Israel’s Messiah, but also the Savior of the entire world, i.e. many nations.



Lesser Goldfinch, Leakey, Texas

Isa. 53:1-3. Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is* no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

A pastor, to whom I listen often, spoke recently about his experience with this chapter of Isaiah when he was in law school in California. He had some fellow students who were Jewish and he witnessed to them pointing out the description of the Messiah from Isaiah 53. These Jewish law students understood how well this passage described Jesus Christ. But then they talked to their rabbi and the rabbi said that Isaiah was talking about Israel as God’s suffering servant, not the Messiah. All too often, when someone does not like what the Bible says, they find a way to re-interpret it.

The passage actually begins in Isa. 52:13 where Isaiah identifies the subject as God’s Servant. “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently.” The Old Testament prophecies characterize the Messiah in two ways. One was as a conquering King who comes with an army and destroys Israel’s enemies and then reigns as King. The second is what we have here, as a suffering Servant. Some of the rabbis of Jesus’ day thought that these contrasting descriptions must refer to two different persons.

“To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” God’s suffering Servant is called the “arm of the LORD.” Jesus, the Servant, Messiah, carries out the work of God. The miracles He did were unequivocal evidence that He was God. The Jewish leaders could not deny that He did them. But in Matt. 12:24 they claimed He did them under the power of Satan whom they called Beelzebub.

“He shall grow up ... as a root out of dry ground.” In Isa. 11:1, the Messiah is identified as “a Root of Jesse,” i.e. a descendant of Jesse through Jesse’s son, King David.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day rejected Jesus as their Messiah. This is what Isaiah prophesied would happen.

In the New Testament we have the report of Jesus after His resurrection appearing to two travelers on the road to Emmaus and explaining to them Old Testament prophecies related to the Messiah (Luke 24:13-27).

Then in Acts 8:26-40 Philip speaks to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading this passage in Isaiah. Paul and others, many times turn to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. If the Jews had believed the report and accepted Jesus as their Messiah, He still would have fulfilled this suffering Servant prophecy and then have fulfilled the prophecy of the conquering King.

But now the fulfillment of the conquering King prophecy remains to be fulfilled in the future. God has promised, so it will happen. Now we can look back and see how God fulfilled the prophecies related to Jesus’ first coming and know that in the same way God will fulfill the remaining unfulfilled prophecies.

But like the Jewish leaders 2,000 years ago, people look at the unfulfilled prophecies and say that God didn’t really mean to fulfill them as they are written. One thousand years does not mean 1,000 years being just one example. Will Jesus reign for 1,000 years or forever? I believe the answer is YES. Just as the Old Testament prophesied a suffering Messiah and a conquering King Messiah, so in the New Testament we have a prophecy of a 1,000 year Kingdom followed by an eternal Kingdom.

Isa. 53:4-6. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah continues his description of God’s suffering Servant. Jesus died to pay the penalty for my sins. The last clause in Isa. 53:6 sums it up. “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” How many is all? Some play word games with the word “all.” They say that when the Bible uses “all” in presenting Jesus’ death on our behalf that it is using it in the sense of “All without distinction, not all without exception.” I find it difficult in understanding 1 John 2:1-2 to refer to a distinct group of people when it says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

Why then, are not all people saved? Even though a person’s sins may be forgiven, unless he believes in Jesus Christ, he still lacks the perfect righteousness that is required to live with God throughout eternity. When an unsaved person appears at the final Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:12, the “books of works will be opened.” In these books there will be a big, fat “0” written by each unbeliever’s name. All his good works are worthless in God’s sight. Just as Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6); so Rom. 4:5 tells us, “But to him who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” When I believed in Jesus Christ, God credited to my account Jesus’ perfect righteousness.

The gospel of John tells us about Nicodemus’ visit with Jesus. Jesus told this first St. Nic in John 3:5, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water (physical birth) and of the Spirit (being born again by the work of the Holy Spirit), he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:15 adds, “Whoever believes in Him (the Son of Man) should not perish but have eternal life.” Without this work of the Holy Spirit with every person who believes in Jesus Christ, no one would have eternal life. My salvation involves a lot more than just forgiveness of sins.

“By His stripes we are healed.” Healed from what? I don’t see anything in the context of Isa. 53 that refers to sickness or the need for physical healing of our human bodies. Yes, Jesus healed lepers, restored sight to the man born blind, told the lame and crippled to walk and did many other signs and miracles. These were done to demonstrate that He was who He claimed to be, God. Passages in the Old Testament prophesy that the Messiah would perform these miracles. But it seems to me that the healing Isaiah has in mind here is a spiritual healing.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.” I see a parallel between this statement and Judg. 21:25. “In those days *there* was no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.” I want to do things my way, not God’s way. This is the way of my sin nature that was passed down to me from Adam.

I memorized Isa. 53:6 when I was in Royal Ambassadors in the Baptist church where I grew up. Paul summarized this verse in Rom. 3:23. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus died on the cross bearing the penalty for my sins and every one else’s sins in this world.

Isa. 53:7-12. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

There are many descriptions of Jesus in these verses. Jesus did not defend Himself during His trials both before the Jewish authorities and the Roman authorities. He could have stopped the proceedings and His crucifixion at any time. He was not a martyr suffering death at the hands of the Romans and the Jewish leaders. He willingly allowed them to crucify Him for my sins. Then at the end after paying for my sins as He was forsaken by both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, He breathed His last, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He was saying that He had completed His work.

“They made His grave with the wicked.” He was crucified between two murdering thieves and the plan was for all three to go into a common grave.

“But with the rich in His death.” Joseph of Arimathea stepped forward, and had Jesus buried in his tomb (Mark 14:32-46).

“It pleased the LORD ...” This was in fulfillment of God’s plan which was decreed in eternity past before the heavens and the earth were ever created.

“He shall see His seed.” Jesus was resurrected and although He did not have any physical seed, i.e. children because He never married, He will see His spiritual descendants. Those who believe in Him, as well as all who trusted in the Lord in previous ages.

He (God the Father) will prolong His (Jesus’) days.” Another reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

“By His Knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many.” I heard the gospel and learned about Jesus Christ, that He died and paid the penalty for my sins. I believed, and God saved me. This verse shows that Jesus also had a hand in saving me. My faith had nothing to do with my salvation. It is God who has saved me.

“I will divide Him a portion ... He shall divide the spoil ...” God the Father glorified Jesus in ways we do not understand because of Jesus’ fulfillment of God’s plan. Jesus in turn shares that glory (“divide the spoil”) “with the strong.” The New Testament many times expands on this.

While all believers in Jesus Christ accept the gift of the forgiveness of their sins, receive eternal life, and have Jesus’ perfect righteousness credited to their account, not all will receive an equal share of this spoil. The division of the spoil goes to the believers who are called “the strong.” These are the believers who grow to spiritual maturity through learning God’s word, and applying it in their lives through all the hardships and difficulties all of us face.

Isa. 61:1-2. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,

Early in Jesus' ministry, He was in the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath. The scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him to read. He unrolled the scroll to Isaiah 61 and read the first verse and the first clause of verse 2, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He stopped – in the middle of the sentence! He handed it to the attendant. Luke 4:21 quotes Jesus saying, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus stopped reading in the middle of the sentence because that prophecy of Isaiah that he had read described what Jesus had come to do. "The rest of the sentence, "the day of vengeance of our God" was still future.

What does this passage that Jesus read tell us about Jesus?

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me." John 1:32 tells us that when Jesus was baptized John saw "the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He (the Spirit) remained upon Him." The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus during His life for His God appointed ministry.

"Because the LORD has anointed Me." God the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit appointing Him to His ministry.

"To preach good tidings to the poor." Jesus came to preach good news (the gospel) to the poor. The poor were Israel suffering under Roman rule. Jesus' message came from the Old Testament. In Deut. 30:1-3 Moses said that when Israel was under the control of a foreign nation (such as, Rome) that God would deliver them out of the captivity when they would "return to the LORD your God and obey His voice,..." John the Baptist and Jesus and His disciples taught this message until it was rejected in Matt. 12, "Repent (return to God), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Greek word translated "repent" actually means to "change your mind." They were to change their mind about God and return to Him as Moses said. Then God would establish His earthly kingdom in Israel ruled by the Messiah.

"To heal the brokenhearted." Jesus performed many miracles of healing. This refers to emotional healing for the Jews who were brokenhearted over the domination of Rome.

"To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound." The Jews in Jesus' time were captives and prisoners of Rome, even though they were living in their own land.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Paul would write in Gal. 4:4, "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son." The Jews were doing a good job of keeping the Law of Moses. Just as obedience to God is expected of us as believers in Jesus Christ, so the obedience of the Jews was to follow their faith in God and His promises of a Messiah. But the Jews thought that they were saved just because they were descendants of Abraham. They were not trusting God. They needed to change their mind about God.

Jesus quit reading at that point because the reference to "the day of vengeance of our God" referred to a future time of judgment from God. For those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, the "day of vengeance" will include the seven year time called the Tribulation, and eventually the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:15 where unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire. For us, as believers, our lives will be evaluated as to how well we have learned and obeyed God's word for possible rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Jer. 18:6-10. "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*, "If that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it."

In this illustration of God as a potter, We can learn a few of the attributes of God. The potter has control over the clay and can make from the clay whatever the potter wants to make. The potter is sovereign over the clay. So God is sovereign over His creation. God has created this world and He created mankind as part of that creation. Only an omnipotent God could have created this world.

In the context of this passage something went wrong in Jer. 18:4. "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make." In this account by Jeremiah, God is like the potter. But if God is omnipotent and the potter is an illustration of God, how could the vessel be marred in the potter's hand? Jeremiah gives us the answer in today's passage in Jer. 18:9-10. "The instant I speak concerning a nation ... if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it." God made the nation Israel and the people in it. When He did this, He also gave the people the ability to choose to obey Him or to disobey. The lesson for me is that both God's sovereignty and the free will or volition of people co-exist in this world God created.

The apostle Paul also mentioned the potter illustration in Rom. 9:20-21. "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, 'Why have you made me like this?'" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" Yes, God created man, all people. In His omniscience He foreknew that some people would obey Him and some would disobey. He still created man.

Gen. 1:26-27 says that God created man "according to Our likeness, ... in His *own* image ..." That image or likeness includes the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey. God did this in His omniscient foreknowledge. He knew who among the angels and who among mankind would be obedient and who would be disobedient. He still created them all. So Paul in the Romans text where he likened God to the potter says "from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor." But it is up to each person as one of the vessels God created to decide whether to be a vessel of honor or dishonor. I did that when I believed in Christ.

God chose Israel to be His people. That began with the call of Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3. In Jer. 18:6 God speaks, "O house of Israel ..." He is speaking of the nation Israel. God as sovereign can bless a nation or He can destroy a nation. So in Jer. 18:7 He says, "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*." God in His omniscient foreknowledge could guide Jeremiah to prophesy in Jer. 25:11 that, because of Israel's disobedience, they would spend seventy years in captivity to Babylon. Likewise, when God called Abraham in His omniscient foreknowledge, God knew that there will come a time when Israel will declare "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 23:39). When that happens God will restore the promised kingdom to Israel. Both Jesus and Jeremiah foresee Israel's future kingdom.

In the potter analogies given by both Jeremiah and Paul, we see not only God's sovereignty but also His omnipotence and omniscience. All of God's divine attributes are fully operative at all times. One is not more important than the others.

Jer. 29:10-14. For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts (plans) that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Jeremiah prophesied during the Babylonian captivity of Israel. Earlier in Jer. 25:11-12 he had mentioned this seventy year duration of the captivity, saying: “Then it shall come to pass, when the seventy years are completed, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,” says the LORD.” Dan. 5 describes a great feast hosted by Belshazzar that was interrupted by God’s handwriting on the wall.” Daniel interprets the writing. The story concludes in Dan. 5:30-31: “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom.”

Shortly after that, Dan. 9:2 recalls these seventy year prophecies of Jeremiah, “I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel continues in this chapter with his great prayer of confession for God’s people.

The important lesson for me is that God has given us His prophetic word as a comfort and encouragement for us. He expects us to know what His thoughts (plans) are for us in the future. As 2 Tim. 4:8 says, “there is laid up for me (Paul) the crown of righteousness, ... and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” God has promised a future reward for those who know and believe God’s prophetic promises.

Many Bible translations render the word “thoughts” in these verses as “plans.” We can learn a lot about God in this passage. God’s thoughts are His plans. As people, we can make plans. Sometimes they work out, but often things change. God’s thoughts or plans come from His omniscience. God knows everything that is knowable. He knows what the future holds for all of us. He also knows what all the alternatives of our choices and decisions would be. Now when God makes His plans, He also has the power to complete those plans. God told Jeremiah that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years. Both Jeremiah and Daniel believed that God would fulfill that prophecy. God’s omnipotence would make it happen.

We still have many Bible prophecies remaining to be fulfilled. Just as God has fulfilled His prophecies in the past, He also will fulfill those that remain. He expects us to know the prophecies (promises) He has revealed to us in His word. When we know them and believe them, they are a comfort and encouragement to us. As Jesus told His disciples the night before He was crucified, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

In today’s passage Jeremiah said “ Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me,” echoing what God told Moses in Deut. 30:2. He said that when the people of Israel found themselves in captivity that He would bring them back to the Land when “you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today.” Jesus also warned the Jewish leaders in Matt. 23:39, “for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Jesus was speaking specifically of His Second Coming which will not happen until the Jews finally believe in Jesus Christ.

Jer. 31:31-34. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

This is an important Old Testament prophecy. It is also mentioned in the New Testament. "Covenant" is just an old Bible word for what we call a contract. Typically, a covenant or a contract is an agreement between two parties. To be binding a contract requires that the parties pay a consideration for entering into the contract. When a person enters into a contract to buy a house, the seller's consideration is the promise to sell, while the buyer deposits earnest money as the buyer's consideration. If the buyer fails to complete the purchase, the seller gets the earnest money. Bible teachers call the new covenant a unilateral covenant. God is the only party to this contract. He has promised. He will do it.

In the case of the "new covenant," the agreement was one-sided. God promised to do something for Israel and Judah. There was no promise forthcoming from Israel and Judah. God, as promissor, paid a consideration: the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. As Jesus said, when He instituted the Lord's Supper or communion, "This is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). The consideration has been paid. But the fulfillment (consummation or closing) of the new covenant is still future.

Many times in the Old Testament we read references to God's delivery of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, i.e. the Exodus. In the New Testament we also have many reminders of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection is the very heart of our Christian faith. By God raising Jesus to life again, I can know that I will also be raised from death to live with God forever.

The new covenant is between God and the people of Israel and Judah. To what extent is the Church involved in the new covenant? This is a question that Bible teachers argue about. My simplistic and inadequate understanding is that when God blesses Israel in fulfilling his promise to Israel, the Church will also receive blessing from the spillover of the blessings Israel receives.

The fulfillment of the new covenant awaits a future time when God will restore the kingdom to Israel. Israel could have received this kingdom 2,000 years ago if they had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. As God said, the time is coming when "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know me, ... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." This is the promise God made to Israel.



**Cabbage White, butterfly, plus Cantharini beetle, Fort Collins, Colorado**



Jer. 33:2-3. "Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it (the LORD *is* His name): ‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’

I chose to memorize these two verses because of the use of the words, “made” and “formed.” The same Hebrew words are also used in Genesis 1 describing the things God made during the six days of Creation, up to the creation of mankind in Gen. 1:27. Then in Gen. 2:7 we are told that “The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground.” While the creation of our universe and world speak to us of God’s great power, the immediate context is looking at the situation in Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonian army and will be completely destroyed, including Solomon’s Temple. The *Word Biblical Commentary* points out that the gender of the three verbal participles in Jer. 33:2 is the same as the word “Jerusalem.” The better understanding is that it is the Lord who “made,” “formed,” and “established” Jerusalem.

I find reading through Jeremiah to be depressing. It is no wonder he is called the “weeping prophet.” Chapter after chapter Jeremiah warns of the coming captivity of the people of Judah because of their failure to trust in the Lord. Jeremiah was in prison in Jerusalem (Jer. 32:1). In Jer. 32:6-15 God tells Jeremiah to buy a field and to put the deed in an earthen vessel (a safe deposit box?) for the time after the end of the Babylonian captivity.

You would think that the nation, Judah, would have listened to Jeremiah and the other prophets who kept telling the people to return to God and trust Him. No, the people of Judah sought human solutions. In the immediate case they had sought an alliance with Egypt to help them drive Babylon out of the land. Nebuchadnezzar was back and Jeremiah was in prison because of his prophecies. Jerusalem had passed the point of no return. It is too late to prevent the destruction by Babylon. Just as Jerusalem failed to return to the Lord, believers today who continue to sin in their lives may suffer the sin unto death.

This was not the first time Jerusalem had been surrounded by an enormous army. In 2 Kings 19:35-36 the Assyrians had invaded Judah and were set to take Judah away into captivity as they had done with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. But King Hezekiah listened to Isaiah and prayed to the LORD. In one night the Angel of the LORD came and destroyed the Assyrian army of 185,000 men who had surrounded Jerusalem.

Then God said to Jeremiah, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” God was telling Jeremiah that if he wanted to know why God told him to buy the field, that all Jeremiah had to do was to ask God, “Why?” God then gave to Jeremiah Jer. 33:6-26 telling him of the future restoration of Jerusalem.

I worship the God who not only created this world, but seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, started bringing the people back from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. The God who destroyed the army of 185,000 men in 701 B.C. in one night, this God can surely take care of the “minor” bumps I face in this life. He will keep His promises. How many times do we try to solve our problems by seeking a human solution? Is it because we do not know what God’s word says, or do we refuse to obey what God has said? Egypt did not save Jerusalem from the Babylonians. My human solutions won’t help me either.



**Common (or White) Checkered-Skipper, butterfly, Katy, Texas**

Lam. 3:21-23. This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. *Through* the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning; Great *is* Your faithfulness.

Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah. As the name implies it is not a particularly cheerful book. These three verses are in the middle of the book are the most familiar to us. We often sing a hymn titled from the last sentence of this passage, “Great is Your faithfulness.”

God’s people, Judah, had failed to listen to Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings. A century earlier, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, had been conquered and carried away into captivity by the Assyrians because Israel had refused to turn away from idol worship and return to faith in God. Judah was now guilty of the same idol worship. Jeremiah had warned that if the people did not return to worshiping God, that they too would end up in captivity. The Babylonians had now come and destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple. That is the story behind Jeremiah writing Lamentations.

In the preceding verses in Lamentations, Jeremiah laments at how bad things are and how low he feels. Lam. 3:18-20 says, “And I said, ‘My strength and my hope Have perished from the Lord.’ Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers And sinks within me.” This was not a happy time for Jeremiah.

“This I recall to mind.” Jeremiah recalls God’s past faithfulness to His people, Israel. Jeremiah is expressing His trust and faith in the Lord. “Therefore I have hope.” Jeremiah has a confident assurance in God’s promises. When Israel returns to faith in God, God will restore the Kingdom.

“*Through* the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed.” There was still a remnant remaining in Judah and what was left of Jerusalem. There was also a remnant of believers carried away as captives to Babylon. Think of the amazing stories of Daniel and Esther during the time of this captivity.

I serve a loving God who is faithful. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews did return to the land. This time they became diligent in obeying the Law given to them by God through Moses. Then in the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:4). Although the Jewish leaders were faithful in keeping the Law and were going through the motions of worshiping God, they had failed to trust in God. The message of John the Baptist and of Jesus and His disciples was to “repent for the Kingdom of God was at hand.” That is, return to faith in God and the promised Kingdom would be established. In Matt. 12:34 the Pharisees accused Jesus of performing miracles under the power of Beelzebub (Satan). The Jews had lost the opportunity of receiving the Kingdom at that time. It has been postponed until a future time. In Matt. 23:38-39 Jesus said to them, “See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” God keeps His promises. When the people of Israel finally return to faith in God and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior and Messiah, the Kingdom will come.

The message to me is that I need to not let myself be carried away in the thinking and activities of the world, so that I neglect God. I need to continue to learn as much as I can about God from His word. I need to conform my thinking to Biblical ideas and not to the thinking of the world.



Cattle Egret, Rosenberg, Texas

Ezek. 12:26-28. Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees *is* for many days *from now*, and he prophesies of times far off.' "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel is a seldom read and an even less studied book of the Old Testament. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. Like Daniel, Ezekiel was one of the captives in Babylon. Ezekiel’s dry bones prophecy in Ezek. 37 is his most famous prophecy. What an encouragement that prophecy must have been to the people of Israel in captivity in Babylon telling them that God would regather them into their land.

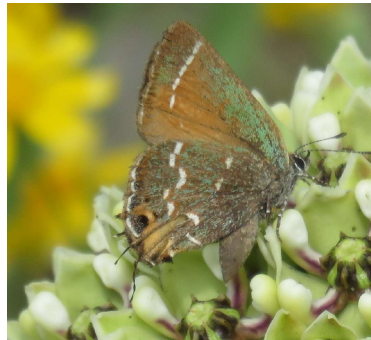
I heard Dr. J. Vernon McGee on the radio the other day speaking about prophecy. He was teaching from Deut. 18:15-22 on how to discern between a true prophet and a false prophet. Every one of a true prophet’s prophecies had to come true. So, even when a prophet was telling the people about an event that might be fulfilled in the distant future, there could be a near fulfillment. Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought back a remnant of the people of Israel from Babylon to the land of Israel. But the ultimate fulfillment of the dry bones prophecy waits for its fulfillment in the Millennium.

The last eleven chapters (38 through 48) of Ezekiel are a puzzlement. (This is a term a genealogy friend of mine liked to use when we were faced with a dead-end tracing our family trees.) Ezek. 38-48 remain to be fulfilled. Chapters 38-39 are about the Gog and Magog invasion and it is hard to find two Bible teachers that agree on when this will occur. The remaining chapters give directions regarding a future Temple in Jerusalem. This is another subject that today is as tough to understand as the rabbis of Jesus’ day had trying to figure out the suffering Messiah and the reigning Messiah prophecies. Exactly, how God will fulfill Ezekiel’s visions, remains to be seen.

The people of Israel had disobeyed God. They had ignored the warnings of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. First, God had allowed the Assyrians to take the Northern Kingdom into captivity. Now, the Babylonians had done the same with Judah. Still there were naysayers among the captives to whom Ezekiel was ministering. “The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.” Ezekiel received this message from God shortly before the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

Peter talked about scoffers in 2 Peter 3:3-4 “scoffers will come in the last days, ... saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.’” Do I live with the daily realization that this might be the last few moments I have to live my life in this world by faith in God, because Jesus can return NOW. This message from God that Ezekiel taught is appropriate for us today. After the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:9-11, the writers of the New Testament clearly expected Jesus to return at any moment. I don’t know how much time I have left, but the exhortation of Col. 4:5 still applies. I need to be “redeeming the time” by how I live and what I do.

Through Ezekiel God reminds the naysayers of his day that God keeps His promises.



**Juniper Hairstreak, Kerr (county) Wildlife Management Area, Texas**

Ezek. 45:15-17 - Part 1. "And one lamb shall be given from a flock of two hundred, from the rich pastures of Israel. These shall be for grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them," says the Lord GOD. "All the people of the land shall give this offering for the prince in Israel. "Then it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel."

This is a part of Ezekiel's closing words of encouragement to the Hebrew captives in Babylon. Ezekiel tells the captives that God will return them to the Promised Land. He describes a rebuilt Temple, the scale of which far surpasses that of Solomon's Temple which the Babylonians destroyed. It is also larger than any Temple the Jews have ever had, even Herod's Temple of Jesus' day which the Romans destroyed in A.D. 70. This Temple prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. But Rev. 21:22 tells us that in the eternal state with the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21:1-3, there will be no Temple. The Temple Ezekiel describes will exist during the one thousand year Millennium.

But why are there sacrifices? The standard understanding of Bible teachers, who hold to a literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, is called the "memorial view." This follows the pattern Jesus set in the Upper Room when He instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). The "memorial view" says that the Millennial sacrifices recall Jesus' death on the cross paying the penalty for our sins. Recently, I heard Dr. Randall Price speak on Ezekiel 40-48. He discussed the restored Temple, as well as, an alternative understanding of the Millennial sacrifices. During the presentation he mentioned a theological journal article by Dr. Charles Ryrie that expressed the same interpretation.

Two groups of people will be living in the Millennium: (1) Believers in Jesus Christ who had died in the previous ages and return with Him at His second Coming. These believers will be in resurrection bodies and will rule and reign with Christ. (2) People who believe in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation and are still living when Jesus returns. Jesus spoke of this second group in Matt. 24:13 when He said, "he who endures to the end will be saved." These believers still have sin natures. They will continue to sin during the Millennium. They also will have children who will sin, and who may or may not choose to believe in Jesus Christ.

Today's verses say that the offerings are "to make atonement for them," i.e., for the people. In the past, the word "atonement" was understood to mean "a covering." But what is covered? Recent scholarship sees the Hebrew word translated "atonement" as referring to a cleansing from sin. Heb. 9:13 and Heb. 10:4,11 say that even under the Old Testament Law given by God through Moses, the sacrifices did not take away sin. As Gen. 15:6 says of Abraham, "And he believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Eternal salvation has always been through faith in God. The Millennial sacrifices are for a temporary cleansing or purification of sinning people. The purification is required for entry into the Temple and because of the presence of Jesus Christ in this world.

This temporary cleansing or purification is parallel to what the apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Prov. 28:13 makes a similar statement. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

Dr. Price spoke for an hour and a half to help his audience understand his approach to the issue of why there will be a Temple during the Millennium along with sacrifices. The sacrifices described may be similar to those in the Old Testament Law, but they are different.

Ezek. 45:15-17 - Part 2. "And one lamb shall be given from a flock of two hundred, from the rich pastures of Israel. These shall be for grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them," says the Lord GOD. "All the people of the land shall give this offering for the prince in Israel. "Then it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel."

Ezekiel chapters 40-48 is perhaps the most puzzling passage in the entire Bible. The Jewish people are living in Captivity in Babylon. God's promises to Abraham of the Land, Seed (a future Messiah) and blessing seem to be preposterous and impossible. Ezekiel encourages the people with his prophecies that God will keep His promises. These final nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel describe the Temple in Jerusalem that will exist during the 1,000 year reign of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the sacrifices that will be offered in that Temple.

At a recent Bible conference, Dr. Randall Price explained his understanding of this section of Ezekiel. In the New Testament book of Hebrews some of the new Jewish believers in Jesus Christ were being challenged to abandon their new Christian faith and return to their former practice of Judaism. Heb. 10:25 commanded them, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." When we read Hebrews we think it is an "either/or" issue. If you believed in Jesus Christ, you did not go to the Temple or synagogues, and you did not offer sacrifices. But actually this did not happen until after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Paul in his ministry always went to the Jewish synagogue to worship and teach. Also in Acts 21 when he was in Jerusalem, he offered a sacrifice in the Temple which resulted in his arrest.

While many understand the Temple sacrifices in this part of Ezekiel to be done as a remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as a payment for our sins, Dr. Price taught that they were for ceremonial cleansing of the unresurrected people living during the Millennium who still possessed sinful human bodies. The cleansing was necessary for their participation in the worship in the Temple and of Jesus Christ. Today in the time of grace during the Church Age, we do this by confessing our sins to God which is commanded in 1 John 1:9.

Who is "the prince in Israel mentioned in these verses? The people bring their offering to "the prince" and he offers it as a sacrifice. The word "prince" simply refers to a ruler. During the Millennium Jesus Christ is the ruler of the world. These verses don't identify the prince because Ezekiel has previously identified him in Ezek. 34:24 as David, which says, "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them." So during the Millennium, the resurrected David is ruling again as king in Israel. Jesus, the Messiah, is ruling the entire world.

The sacrifices Ezekiel describes are not for obtaining eternal forgiveness for sins. This can only come through faith in Jesus Christ. Eternal salvation is never from any works that we can do.

As believers, if we want to walk in fellowship with God, we need to keep short accounts through the confession of our known sins. When we do that God forgives those sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. This is a temporal forgiveness and cleansing. The eternal forgiveness for our sins comes from believing in Jesus Christ in the first place. When we do that, we are born again, receiving the imputation of Jesus' perfect righteousness to our account in the same way Abraham did in Gen. 15:6. "And he believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Dan. 9:24-27. "Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times."And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

I have lumped two memory verse cards into one day’s thoughts. This does not do justice to this important prophecy. I first read about this prophecy in the *Scofield Reference Bible* I received as a present when I was twelve years old. I tried to explain it to a Jewish classmate in college, but I couldn’t figure it out.

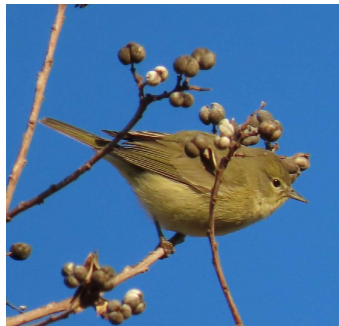
The “weeks” are literally “sevens” and are understood to refer to years. But to the world of Daniel’s time, a year was 360 days, not 365. The Persian ruler, Artaxerxes, whom Nehemiah served as cupbearer, issued the command “to restore and build Jerusalem” in March-April, 444 B.C. Counting the days in the 62 plus 7 weeks of years takes us to Passover week in April 33 A.D. In Luke 19:42, Jesus said, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, ...” This was at the time of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This was the Jewish leaders’ last chance to accept Jesus as their Messiah, and they lost it. As the angel Gabriel told Daniel, “And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off.”

So the timing is for 7 weeks plus 62 weeks (total 69 weeks of years) from the decree given to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes until the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. His crucifixion, at least partially, brought about the first three of the six events mentioned in Dan. 9:24, “to finish the transgression, to make and end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity.” The ultimate fulfillment of all six will occur when the Kingdom is restored after the second coming of Christ.

Messiah was “cut off.” “The people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” The Romans under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D.

That leaves one week of seven years to go. Dan. 9:27 tells us this final week of years will begin when the “prince who is to come” “shall confirm a covenant with many for one week.” The “many” would be the Jews who are living in Jerusalem at that time since this entire prophecy is concerned with “your people and your holy city.” This “prince who is to come” is described in various ways, but we know him as the Antichrist. He is called “the man of sin” in 2 Thess. 2:1-3 where it tells us that he will not be identified until after all believers in Jesus Christ have been gathered “together to Him.”

The primary takeaway for me in this fantastic prophecy is the perfect timing for the cutting off of the Messiah. Since this part of the prophecy was fulfilled precisely, then certainly I can expect all unfulfilled prophecy to be fulfilled similarly. God keeps His word. I don’t have to find the hidden meanings in Scripture.



Orange-crowned Warbler, Katy, Texas

Dan. 12:1-3. "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, *Even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.

This passage has a special meaning for me. Dan. 12:3, "Those who are wise ..." is on my Grandfather Weyer's grave marker. He was a well-known Presbyterian pastor, serving churches in Hastings, Nebraska; Pueblo, Colorado; Tacoma, Washington; and Duluth, Minnesota.

"At that time." According to Dr. Thomas Constable's *Notes*, this is the time of the Antichrist during the Tribulation, who is called in Dan. 11:31 the "abomination of desolation." Dan. 10-11 are difficult to understand. Daniel is looking at Israel during the time of the Antichrist. "There shall be a time of trouble." This is Daniel's seventieth week from Dan. 9:24-27. In Matt. 24:9 Jesus says of this time, "They will deliver you up to tribulation, and kill you."

"At that time your people shall be delivered." Jewish believers living in Israel will be delivered. This is not speaking of eternal salvation, but that they will survive perils and death during the Tribulation. Jesus warns in Matt. 24:15-16 to "flee to the mountains" when the "abomination of desolation" appears. In Matt. 24:13 Jesus restates this prophecy of Daniel, saying "He who endures to the end will be saved." This is often taken out of context and misapplied. Again Jesus is not referring to eternal salvation, but to the survival of the believers who are still living at Jesus' Second Advent.

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." At the end of the Tribulation there will be a resurrection of believers who died or were martyred during the Tribulation. Prior to the commencement of the Tribulation Jesus returned to the clouds and believers "in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:13-16) are resurrected to meet Jesus in the air to spend eternity with Him. Unbelievers are resurrected in Rev. 20:12 to appear at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The verse that is on my grandfather's grave marker is Dan. 12:3. "Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Rev. 20:4 says:

"they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

God has already decreed what will happen from the creation of this world until the final consummation of all the ages in Rev. 21. He has told us through prophets, like Daniel, what He wants us to know about these future events. We can see from the way God has already fulfilled prophecy that He will fulfill the remaining prophecies (promises) He has given us.

How I live my life is important. I have believed in Jesus Christ. My sins are forgiven and I have eternal life. I know that no matter what I do I will spend eternity with God as He has promised. But do I want to kind of sneak around to the back of the New Jerusalem and peer through a knothole in the wall to watch the events taking place there during eternity? Or alternatively, I can, maybe, play a real part in the events of eternity. How I live my life is important. When Jesus returns I want to "have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).



**White-throated Sparrow, near Bellville, Texas**

Hos. 11:1-3. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images. I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them."

This is a part of the Bible that gets little attention. When I read through the Bible and come to these minor prophets, I find them hard to understand. How do they relate to me and my life? So why did I memorize these verses? Matthew quoted the first verse here in Matt. 2:15 in reference to Jesus. As Israel was in Egypt and God brought them out of Egypt, so Jesus and His parents spent time in Egypt before they returned to Nazareth. But even beyond that prophetic analogy, there is an important message and warning for us. In Hos. 11:1-3 God is speaking through Hosea.

In mentioning Israel, God is addressing the ten tribes of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Hosea warns of impending judgment from God for Israel's idolatry. Assyria was a growing military power. Unless Israel returns to God and forsakes the idols, Assyria will conquer Israel and take them into captivity. This is the final and ultimate of the seven stages of discipline foretold in Lev. 26:14-39.

Israel had turned from Yahweh who had delivered them from Egypt and was worshiping the Baals and other idols. In Exo. 32:3 when Moses was on the mountain receiving the tablets of the Law, the people of Israel had Aaron make a golden calf for them to worship. As Moses came down from the mountain he heard the sounds of their orgy of worship of the golden calf. Hosea was prophesying 600 or so years later and what was happening? "They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images." Here were the people of God doing exactly what their unbelieving neighbors in the world were doing. Today, we know better than to worship golden calves and carved images. So what do we do?

What god do some of our churches worship? My God promised Abraham a city (Heb. 11:10). He promised David an eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Some churches teach that God has taken these promises away from Israel and given them to the Church. More than that, they say that the city promised to Abraham is not a real city and the Kingdom promised to David is not a real kingdom. They are only allegories. The God I worship is a God of truth. He keeps His word and promises.

The Bible says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). In another place, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Tit. 3:5). So why do we look at the way a person lives to decide if they are a Christian. I can't tell you how many times I have heard well-meaning people say something like, "So and so is such a good person, I know they are a Christian."

The world is concerned about many issues today: climate change, gender identity, right to choose versus right to life, world peace, racial justice, and many others. In 2 Pet. 1:3 Peter wrote that God "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us ..."

Do I look to the ideas of the world to solve these issues and questions? Or do I look to God's word? For Hosea and the people of Israel, they had the law that God had given them through Moses. They did not follow it. "They did not know that I (God) had healed (saved) them."



Orange Sulphur, butterfly, Gatesville, Texas



Joel 2:21-24. Fear not, O land; Be glad and rejoice, For the LORD has done marvelous things! Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; For the open pastures are springing up, And the tree bears its fruit; The fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you—The former rain, And the latter rain in the first *month*. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

These verses are a reminder to us of God’s promises to Israel. Joel ministered sometime after the reign of Solomon, when Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Ten tribes were in the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel. Two tribes were in the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah. Joel was ministering to Judah. The Northern Kingdom throughout its history was unfaithful to God.

The Mosaic Law, with 613 commandments, was a conditional agreement (contract or covenant) between Israel and God. God said, “If you obey Me, I will bless you. If you disobey, I will punish you.” The consequences of disobedience are spelled out in Lev. 26:14-39 in seven stages or levels of discipline. God would give Israel economic prosperity if they obeyed. If Israel was disobedient, there would be crop failures, oppression from foreign invaders, and eventually the nation would be carried into captivity. All of these things happened.

Earlier in this book, Joel 1:4, Joel tells about the land and crops being destroyed by locusts. God had brought economic disaster upon Judah for their failure to faithfully serve and worship Him. In Joel 2:1 Joel announced, “The day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand.” In the next several verses Joel describes what he means by “the day of the LORD.” It is a time of judgment. Foreign armies invade the land. There are earthquakes. God is disciplining His children, i.e. Judah (and Israel). What are the people to do?

Joel tells them in Joel 2:12: “Turn to Me with all your heart.” They were to have “no other gods before Me” (Exo. 20:3). They were to quit worshipping the idols and false gods of their neighboring nations. This idea of turning to God is Old Testament “speak” for trusting or believing in God. When the people of Judah did this, then God kept the promises in today’s verses. Economic prosperity returned to the land. “The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.”

For us, we need to remember that these are promises to Israel. These were based upon an agreement between God and Israel. The New Testament teaches us that we are not under the Mosaic Law. We are looking for the return of Jesus Christ when we, as believers, “shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

There was a near fulfillment of this prophecy in Joel’s time. But there remains a future and ultimate fulfillment that is yet to come. God is faithful. He keeps His promises. He has promised a future kingdom to Israel when Israel returns to faith in God.

Although we have a new nation of Israel in a portion of the Promised Land that was established by international law following World War 1, the people of Israel remain in a state of unbelief in God. The ultimate day of the LORD remains for a future time. The day of the Lord will come with the Tribulation, Daniel’s “seventieth week.” At the end of that time, Israel will return to faith in God and their kingdom will be re-established for a 1,000 years and then rolled into the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

For me, I can look at how God has fulfilled prophecy in the past and know that He will continue to keep His promises to me.

Joel 2:28-32. "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass *That* whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

Peter made this passage famous when he quoted it in his message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:16-21. Joel 2:28 begins with a time marker, "afterward." After what? After the people of Israel have returned to the Lord and trusted in Him, and not in the idols and false gods their neighbors were telling them to worship. But this prophecy of Joel goes beyond the near fulfillment of prophecy God promised Israel, when they returned to Him, to a distant fulfillment.

Jesus had promised His disciples in John 16:7 that after He left this world that He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. This is what He did in Acts 2:2-4 when the disciples began to speak in foreign languages and people thought they were drunk. Peter answered that this was the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit about whom Joel had prophesied. But this was not a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy because Joel's prophecy included much more than just the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. There are a number of events here in Joel's prophecy. In Acts 2 the people of Israel had not yet returned to the Lord and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. There were no wonders in the heavens. The wonders sound to me like Rev. 8:12. When we compare them with other Scriptures we can come up with a reasonable sequence.

I would place the "wonders in the heavens and in the earth" as occurring in Daniel seventieth week. Joel tells us that this is "Before the great and awesome day of the LORD." In Matt. 24:29-31, Jesus repeated Joel's prophecy of the sun being "turned into darkness, And moon into blood." He said that this is after the Tribulation, but prior to His Second Coming. Rev. 19:11-21 describes Jesus returning with the armies of heaven to destroy the armies of the Antichrist and false prophet. This fits with the "day of the LORD" of which Joel wrote. At the end of the Tribulation, there is a remnant of Jewish believers in Jesus Christ who fulfill the prophecy: "whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." They enter the future Kingdom promised to Israel. Joel writes "And it shall come to pass afterward (after the day of the LORD when Jesus returns with the armies of heavens ...) That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. ..."

On the Day of Pentecost there were some speaking in foreign languages, and some hearing the messages in their own language. But the Holy Spirit was not poured out on all flesh at that time.

Is my understanding correct? To me it fits. We have the advantage of the complete revealed word of God from which we can understand what God wants us to know. Joel, as all the Old Testament believers, only had available to him what God had revealed at that time. Joel's prophecy is about Israel. Joel knew nothing about the Church. God has made specific promises to Israel. He will fulfill those promises (prophecies). God keeps His word. Because God will fulfill His prophecies (promises) to Israel, I know He will keep His promises to me, starting with, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31).

Amos 3:1-3. Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Amos addressed this message to the people of Israel. But what Amos says here applies very well to believers today. First, we need to remember that under the Mosaic Law, which was an agreement, contract, or covenant between God and His people, Israel, God promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, i.e. the 613 commandments in the Law, then God would prosper Israel materially with good crops. If they disobeyed, then Israel could face up to seven stages of discipline, each one being more severe than the previous stage. Leviticus 26 spells out the promise of prosperity (Lev. 26:3-13) and the stages of discipline (Lev. 26:14-39).

Many times in the Old Testament, God reminded Israel of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Similarly, in the New Testament, we are reminded often that Jesus died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Then God raised Him from death. If Jesus did this for me, how then should I live?

Unlike God’s covenantal agreement with Israel in the Old Testament where God promised Israel material prosperity for obedience, believers today do not have the same promise of prosperity. What we do have are promises for future rewards, crowns, or commendation (“Well done, good and faithful servant,” Luke 19:17) in God’s future Kingdom and in the New Heaven and New Earth.

“Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel.” The people of Israel had disobeyed God’s Law.

“Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” This warning through Amos to Israel, 2,700 years ago, applies to believers today. Heb. 12:6, “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” When I sin and fail in my walk with God, I can expect discipline from God for my disobedience.

Then Amos gives us the first of seven rhetorical questions. These questions all involve the happening of one event that logically follows from a prior event. Amos gives his conclusion to the seven questions in Amos in Amos 3:8: “The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” This is what Amos does in his prophetic message from God to Israel.

“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” This is a truism or a maxim. This is a statement that is generally true. When I sin, I am not walking with God. To restore my walk with God, I need to confess my sin as it says in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When I confess my sins, I am agreeing with God that what I have done is sinful.

I see another aspect of walking with God. I need to know what God wants me to know so that I can walk in agreement with Him. This is why God has given us His word and Bible teachers. I need to learn His word as well as I can so that I can walk in agreement with God.



**Dunlin, Oyster Lake, near Collegeport, Texas**

Tit. 1:9-11. holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

These verses contain the last three of seventeen qualifications that Paul gives to Titus for the men he needs to appoint as pastors on the Island of Crete. In the context Paul refers to these appointed men as “bishops” and “elders,” an indication that the words are synonymous. These final three qualifications refer to the functions that a pastor or elder should fulfill. Paul, as an apostle, delegated to Titus the authority to appoint these church leaders.

A pastor is to hold “fast the faithful word as he has been taught.” Each of us have had pastors and teachers who have taught us God’s word. Unfortunately, not all of them have the same understanding of what the Bible says. So Paul goes on to warn Titus that the elders he appoints must know God’s word so well that they “may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

In Titus’ day, believers had the Old Testament and the teaching of the apostles. But as today’s verses tell us, there were many false teachers who contradicted both the teaching of the Old Testament and that of the apostles. Most of the books of the Bible were written to correct those who were speaking things that contradicted the truth of God’s word. The same things happen today. One preacher says one thing, but another preacher says something else.

The Bible gives us the panorama of the history of the world from Creation in Gen. 1:1 to the new heaven and new earth in the eternal state of Rev. 21-22. As Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:16, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.” Since “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God,” there are no contradictions in God’s word. When a person teaches the Bible, is he relying on what some church father in the past has taught or is he basing his understanding on a passage in the Bible. If on the Bible, are there other passages that appear to say something else? How does he resolve the differences or does he ignore them?

Too much of what is taught in churches today is based on the traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation, and not on God’s word. Peter wrote to Jewish believers in 1 Pet. 1:18, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers.” Peter was writing about the oral tradition of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, and not the written Law of the Old Testament.

I must evaluate what I hear taught, not only in church, but also in the world around me, against what the Bible says. What was the author of the Scripture passage trying to say to his original readers, and how would the original readers have understood what was written? How does my understanding align with other passages?

God has given us His word, the Bible, that we can know the truth. We are commanded to study it and to know it. 1 Pet. 2:2, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” We also have the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.” They did not blindly accept what Paul and his missionary team were teaching, but verified it from the Scriptures they had.

Do I know God’s word so well that I can discern between true teaching and the false? Heb. 5:14 defines a spiritually mature believer. “Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Tit. 2:11-14. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

We send and support missionaries and evangelists that God’s message of salvation may be heard throughout the world. God’s grace that brings salvation is available to all people, but as is clearly taught in the Bible, God expects us to tell them. When I believed in Jesus Christ, God’s grace saved me from the penalty of sin. But is this the grace to which Tit. 2:11 is referring? Read the rest of the sentence in Tit. 2:12, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live ...”

God’s grace teaches me through His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit how I should live my life. “Soberly,” this is not talking about avoiding excessive drinking, but about how I should think. Other translations say “sensibly” or “self-controlled,” rather than “soberly.” My thoughts should be grounded on what the Bible teaches. I should not be taken in by the false ideas I hear in the world, on television, on the internet, from our politicians, or from those who perpetuate Darwinian racism by favoring people of one race above another. “Righteously,” how I should live in relationship to other people. “Godly,” “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Jesus is my example for how I should live. Paul describes it, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” Now that I have believed, God’s grace continues to save me from the power of sin, as I walk by faith in His word.

Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing ...” “Hope” is a major subject in the Bible. No matter how bad the situations I face may appear to be, I can have confidence and full assurance in God’s promises. My ultimate hope (confidence) is that He will fulfill what he has promised by way of prophecy. “Glorious appearing.” The apostle Paul links both “hope” and “glorious appearing” here as two sides of a single coin. How well do I know the promises of God regarding the future? Do I live each day as if it could be the Day when I am caught up together in the clouds with all believers to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17)? So Tit. 2:13 tells me that if I have the confident expectation that Jesus could return at any moment, bringing me salvation from the very presence of sin, then I should live my life in a certain way.

Paul also tells us that Jesus Christ is both “our great God and our Savior.” Tit. 2:13 here confirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

“Who gave Himself for us. Christ died in my place, as my substitute. “That He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.”



Great Blue Heron, Rockport, Texas

Tit. 3:1-4. Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

Earlier in this epistle to Titus, Paul wrote that Titus, as a pastor, should be teaching and encouraging his congregation. In the previous verse, Tit. 2:15, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” Now in today’s verses beginning the third chapter, Paul writes about how we, as believers, should live our lives. Tit. 3:1 begins with a list of things that we, as believers, should be doing.

First, we are “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey.” Paul does not limit this instruction with words, like “as long as no one is looking.” He does not say it is acceptable to disobey when you can get away with it. This means the obvious. I am to obey traffic laws. I am to pay the taxes that I owe. The book of Daniel gives us examples of when we should disobey. This is when the rulers and authorities tell us to do something that violates God’s commands. So in Daniel 3 when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego refused to bow down and worship the golden image, they had to face the consequences of disobedience to the king, i.e. the fiery furnace. Likewise, Daniel in Daniel 6 continued to pray to God when the king forbid prayer to anything other than himself. Daniel’s faithful obedience to God did not exempt him from the lions’ den.

“To be ready for every good work.” Even though we are not saved by good works and being saved does not mean that we will automatically live a life of good works, God does expect us to produce good works in our lives.

“To speak evil of no one.” Too often we focus on the do’s and don’t’s of the Christian life and ignore the words that we say. We repeat the stories we have heard about other people. If someone does something to hurt us, we tell everyone we can about it. The people we tell, then tell it to others. So the gossip continues to spread. Paul told Titus, “Speak evil of no one.”

“Be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.” Too often I get frustrated, and let my frustrations show in my words and actions with other people. This is not what God wants me to do. I am “to be ready for every good work.”

As a born again believer, I am not to continue to live as I formerly did when I was “once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”

In Tit. 3:4 Paul begins a few verses discussing salvation as a basis for God expecting me to produce every good work in my life. “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” This leads into the next verse, Tit. 3:5, which I memorized out of context seventy years ago because of the important principle it teaches. God saved me, not by my works. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Notice that it is God who “saved us.” He didn’t save us because of any good works we did. The “washing of regeneration” is Paul’s multi-syllabic word for being born again. Now the Holy Spirit indwells us.

In Tit. 3:7 Paul concludes the thought he began in verse 4, “that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” When God saved us, He gave us eternal life. This gift of eternal life opens the potential of an even greater inheritance in the form of potential for even greater rewards by producing good works in our lives. So in Tit. 3:8 Paul says that I “should be careful to maintain good works.”

Tit. 3:8-11. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

“This is a faithful saying.” Paul is referring to what he has just written in Tit. 3:7, “that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Paul expands on that thought in these verses. I am justified by grace because I have believed in Jesus Christ. I have eternal life, but Paul also wrote that we, as believers who are justified, “should become heirs.” What can I do to become an heir?

“Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” Paul did not write that I, as a believer, will maintain good works. That is an erroneous idea taught by some who teach “perseverance of the saints” and “Lordship salvation.” That teaching makes good works a post-requisite for salvation. But Paul has just written in Tit. 3:5, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.”

Being “careful to maintain good works” is what I need “to affirm constantly.” It is all too easy for me to become side-tracked and to do things my way and not to follow what God has taught in His word.

“These things are good and profitable to men.” How I live my life day by day will not earn me eternal life. As a believer, I already possess eternal life as a gift from God. But my daily walk in obedience to God’s word can earn me a profit (or rewards) in eternity, over and beyond eternal life. That is my understanding of what Paul has written here and elsewhere. 2 Cor. 5:10. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

My grandfather’s grave in Wheaton, Illinois, mentions Daniel 12:2-3: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” My grandfather was a pastor who faithfully served the Lord. This bronze plaque honors him by suggesting that he earned something over and above eternal life as one who was wise and in the way that he turned “many to righteousness.”

Then the warning: “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law.” Tit. 1:10-11 warns against the false teachers who strayed from God’s word, “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” These are warnings to me not to get caught up with those who teach ideas contrary to the Bible or even with good thoughts that have no Biblical basis.



**Swainson’s Hawk, near Marathon, Texas**

Philemon 4-7. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

The apostle Paul was a man of prayer. As I read Paul’s letters in the New Testament, I can’t help but notice the number of times, Paul writes that he was praying for his readers. To Philemon Paul wrote a commendation: Paul was thanking God for him and for his ministry. Philemon’s life and ministry showed a great love and faith for Jesus Christ and for other believers.

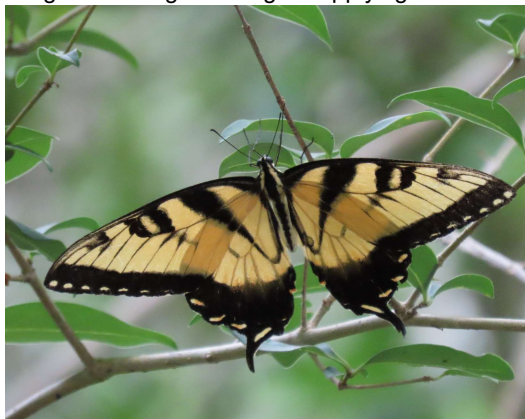
Philemon’s life was a testimony to his faith in Jesus Christ. Paul mentions that he had heard of Philemon’s love and faith. Both of these are part of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23. From this Paul saw that Philemon was walking by means of the Spirit in his life.

Local believers were meeting together as a church in Philemon’s house (Philemon 2). The “sharing of your faith” is the fellowship with each other that Philemon was experiencing with the group of believers. By fellowship we can understand that Philemon and the believers meeting in his house were working together toward the common goal of obedience to God’s word and spreading the gospel.

“That the sharing (fellowship) of your faith may become effective ...: Judging by what Paul has written it appears that this fellowship in God’s word was already effective. Dr. Constable’s *Notes* comments that Paul’s prayer is that this sharing “would become even more energetic.” I can never reach total perfection in my life. Spiritual growth is an ongoing process. As Heb. 2:1 says, “Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” I must constantly be learning, meditating, and applying God’s word. If I don’t, I will drift away from what I should be doing. Spiritual growth is like physical therapy or physical exercise and work-outs in the gym. You gradually build up strength. But when you slack off, you will regress. Paul is praying for continued spiritual growth for Philemon and his fellow believers.

*The New King James Version* uses the word “acknowledgment” whereas others translate the Greek word as “full knowledge” or “understanding.” They not only knew and understood “every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus,” but they were experiencing the blessings of these good things in applying God’s word.

“Joy and consolation” could be rendered “thanksgiving and encouragement.” The word for “hearts” is not the usual word which refers to our mind and thoughts. But this is more the responder within each one of us. The thinking of the Greeks is that emotions arose from our inner parts. Philemon’s life and ministry had refreshed and encouraged the believers who were meeting at his house.



**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, butterfly, Houston, Texas**



The book of Hebrews. Before looking at my memory verses from Hebrews, I am doing an overview of the book. The New Testament books of Hebrews, James and Revelation are a challenge for Christians to understand. When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, he placed these three books in the appendix because he was not certain that they should have been included in the Bible. These three books rely heavily upon the readers knowledge of the Old Testament.

As implied by the name of the book, Hebrews was written to Jewish believers in Jesus Christ. They were under pressure from former Jewish friends to abandon their Christian faith and to return to Judaism. The book repeatedly tells us reasons why Jesus Christ is superior and should remain the focus of our lives and worship.

The author of Hebrews is unknown. I remember when I was growing up that I somehow had received the idea that Paul wrote Hebrews. Although there have been many suggestions as to whom the author could have been, we do not know who he was.

There are five “warning passages” in the book of Hebrews. In these five passages the author warns his Hebrew readers that if they abandon worshiping with other Christians and return to Judaism there are dire consequences. Christians today understand these dire consequences typically in one of three ways.

1. Even though these Hebrew Christians have believed in Jesus Christ and were saved, if they return to Judaism they will have lost their salvation. As one friend of mine who held this view told me, if you are saved by faith and your faith saves you, then you can decide to no longer believe and you will no longer be saved. Well I believed, but that faith did not save me. I believed and God saved me, and what God has done I cannot undo. If there is anything that I can do that will result in the loss of my salvation, then that is a work by which I am saved. But I am not saved by works.
2. These Hebrews only thought they were saved. But if they did return to Judaism, they were not truly saved. They only had a head belief and not a heart belief. If they were really saved, they would persevere in their faith. This makes saving faith dependent upon the works a person does after salvation. We hear this all the time today. We look at a person and say, “So and so is such a good person, and does so many good things, they are a wonderful Christian.” Or the opposite: “Look at what he (or she) has done, they must not be saved.”
3. The way I understand Hebrews is that we are all sinners. Even after I believe, I still fail many times in my Christian walk. I am still a sinner. There are consequences that I face when I sin. I can expect that God will discipline me during my life here, just as a father will discipline a disobedient child. I will also appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ after I die or when Jesus returns. At this judgment I will be evaluated for how well I lived my life in obedience to Him.

When I look at Hebrews from the third approach, I find that it begins to make sense. It presents a real challenge to me to know what God wants me to do and to do it. Throughout the book the author uses the plural pronoun, “we.” He is speaking of himself and the people to whom he was writing. Heb. 3:1 clearly shows that the author thought he was writing to believers. “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.” Hebrews was written to tell me how I, as a believer, should live.



**A visitor from south of the border, Southern Lapwing, Mercedes, Texas**

Heb. 1:1-3. God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the Prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Hebrews begins by telling us that God the Father has spoken to us. Previously, He spoke through Old Testament prophets, but now through His Son. These verses then proceed to tell us about God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Hebrews is first and foremost about Jesus Christ. What do these verses tell me about Jesus Christ?

First, we are told that Jesus Christ is God’s Son. Yes, He is the Son of God in His humanity through God the Holy Spirit as the gospel of Luke tells us. But the Bible also uses the term “son of” in a different sense. In Matt. 12:24 the Jewish leaders called Jesus, “the son of Beelzebub” accusing Jesus of being just like Satan whom the Jews called, Beelzebub. So “son of” is also used in the Bible to describe a person as just like another person called by inference “the father.” Jesus has all the characteristics of God the Father’s deity. Jesus is unique. He is fully human, but also fully God.

“Heir of all things.” Jesus in His humanity, will at some future time inherit all things, become the possessor of all things. Since this says He is the “heir,” He does not yet possess all things.

“He made the worlds.” Jesus Christ in His deity was the active member of the Godhead who spoke the words of Gen. 1, creating the world.

“Being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” Jesus Christ has the same deity as God. He is God. All three Persons of the Godhead have the full attributes of Deity. Together the three Persons comprise one God.

“Upholding all things by the word of His power.” Jesus is omnipotent, all-powerful. He can do anything and everything that He intends to do. He is keeping the world running, i.e. “Upholding all things,” according to the processes that He created when He spoke them into existence during the seven days of Creation.

“By Himself purged our sins.” The pronoun “our” tells me that the writer was including his readers in this statement. The author knew that he was writing to believers. Jesus offered Himself as my sacrifice, as my substitute, to pay the penalty for my sins. At any point in His life, He could have blown the whistle and ended the game. He suffered all kinds of verbal abuse and physical torture. Yet He stayed the course, all the way to the end. Finally, at the end, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and He breathed his last. Heb. 5 tells us more about this.

“Sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father, on God the Father’s throne. Jesus is not yet sitting on His own throne as the King He will some day be. The Jews expected the Messiah to come and establish His kingdom on earth. Jesus came and the Jewish leaders rejected Him as their Messiah. Because of this rejection, the kingdom has been postponed. Hebrews tells me His kingdom is still to come. God keeps His promises.



**Vermillion Flycatcher, near Richmond, Texas**

Heb. 1:6-8 . But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." But to the Son *He* says: "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom.

I remember in earlier times when I read this I would scratch my head trying to figure out what was being said. I did not have a frame of reference for these Old Testament quotations.

“But when He again brings the firstborn into the world.” “He” refers to God the father. Who is the “firstborn”? Usually words referring to Jesus begin with a capital letter, but the translations I checked do not do this. But the author’s message in this first chapter of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is superior to angels. In the Old Testament the firstborn received special blessings from his father. The firstborn was to lead the family after the father’s death.

The word “again” raises the question of when was the first time and when will the second time be? The first time was when Jesus was born, lived His life, and died on the cross for my sins. The second time then must refer to His return, not for the Church where we meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17), but when He actually returns to the earth and establishes His kingdom (Rev. 19:11-21). This is the future promise for which the Jews were looking in anticipation of their Messiah.

The first chapter of Hebrews is full of quotations from the Old Testament. I see here that angels are spirits or like the wind. They do not have physical bodies although at times in the Old Testament they were able to take on physical bodies like humans. They come and go like the wind and are like a flame of fire. Does the reference to fire imply the judgment that will happen at Jesus’s return, the destruction of the armies of the Antichrist in the Armageddon Battle/War?

Angels are called God’s ministers. God created them to be His servants. In contrast Christ will be seated on His throne to rule forever. Heb. 1:8 strongly affirms that Jesus is God and that angels worship Him as God. “Your throne, O God.” “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” Only God can be the object of worship. So the instruction for angels to worship the “firstborn” also confirms that Jesus is God. In Heb. 1:14 the writer gives us assurance that God has sent forth angels to minister to us believers who anticipate our inheritance in the future kingdom where Christ will rule.

When Jesus returns, He will no longer be sitting on His Father’s throne, but will rule this world in the kingdom God has promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The kingdom the Jews were expecting and anticipating. “A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.”

Since all these things about Jesus are true, how then should I live my life? Jesus needs to be my top priority. Everything I say and do should bring glory to Him.



**Sedge Wren, near Cat Spring, Texas**

Heb. 1:13-14. But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

The author quotes from Psa. 110:1 as he finishes this first chapter showing how great our Savior, Jesus Christ, is. "Sit at My right hand Till I make your enemies Your footstool." In Heb. 1:3 the author told us that Christ was sitting "at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He (Jesus Christ) has completed His work of dying on the cross for our sins. In the future Jesus' victory over His enemies will be realized as Heb. 1:8 says, "And to the Son *He* says, 'Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom.'" The angels, on the other hand, are servants. Their work continues. They are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister."

To whom do the angels minister? "For those who will inherit salvation." Earlier, the writer had written about Jesus that "He had by Himself purged our sins" by His death on the cross. So the writer assumes that he is writing to believers who already possess eternal salvation. But now he is talking about a future salvation that is to be inherited.

We also need to consider the way the writer presents his material. In the first chapter he has quoted seven Old Testament passages. As the title of the book indicates this book was written from a Jewish perspective. The word "Salvation" in the Old Testament is often used to describe the deliverance of God's people from the oppression of their enemies and their consequent enjoyment of God's blessings. This could be a near term event of victory in a battle with these enemies, but also through deliverance into the promised Messianic Kingdom.

We know from what comes later in the book of Hebrews that these believers were under pressure from their friends and neighbors to abandon their Christian faith and return to the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Testament Law. This verse reminds them that God has promised them deliverance (salvation).

Here is a summary of the situation facing these first century Jewish believers. John the Baptist came and was followed by Jesus and His disciples with the message "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:1). The Jewish leaders and people for the most part reject the offer of the Kingdom and do not believe in Jesus. In Matt. 12:24ff the rejection is final and Jesus changes the direction of His ministry. No longer do He and His disciples preach "the Kingdom is at hand." But Jesus begins to teach with parables. The kingdom is postponed until the Jewish people will accept Jesus as their Messiah. As Jesus says in Matt. 23:39, "For I say to you, you will see Me no more until you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" The book of Hebrews emphasizes to these Jewish believers that the promise of the Kingdom still remains to be fulfilled. They need to remain faithful in their ministry to Jesus and not return to the old Jewish rituals and sacrifices.

I thank God that although I have never seen an angel, I have been delivered many times from bad situations and potential disasters. I do not know what the day to day future holds, but I do know what God's final victory and deliverance will be.



Hooded Oriole, city cemetery, Falfurrias, Texas

Heb. 2:1-4. Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

This begins the first of the five warning passages in Hebrews. Dr. Tom Constable in his *Expository Notes on the Bible* says that this is the mildest of the five. It begins with the word, “Therefore.” In light of what was written in Chapter 1 then I need to do this. Chapter 1 tells me that Christ is superior to angels. Heb. 1:14 refers to “those who will inherit salvation.” This is a future salvation, not the eternal salvation, I received as a gift from God when I believed in Jesus Christ. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, all believers will be delivered into the Kingdom promised to Israel.

So what is the warning? “Give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard lest we drift away.” These Jewish believers had been taught the word of God by those who had heard it firsthand from Jesus Christ. They may have actually seen signs and miracles by the apostles that demonstrated that the apostles were speaking God’s word. If they had not seen these signs and miracles, at least they had received first hand reports from those who had seen them. For us, we have the testimony of God’s word, the Bible.

“Drift away.” This pictures a slow departure from the truth of God’s word. Not an immediate and complete rejection. But step by step, we hear and accept one small false statement. Then another comes along and we take another step away from the truth. Eventually, we can end up believing ideas that are far removed from what God intends us to learn from His word.

“The word spoken through angels” is generally held to be the law given to Moses, all 613 commandments. Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who grew up under Moses’ law. They knew what the writer was talking about.

In Dr. Charles Ryrie’s book, *So Great Salvation*, he has a chapter in which he lists a selection of fifteen different gospel messages. There are many more that he could have used. Almost all of them add an element of works to God’s free grace gift of eternal salvation. If preachers can’t get the most basic teaching of God’s word, correct, i.e. the gospel, what do they do with other parts of the Bible?

If I don’t know and understand what God has given me in His word to guide me in my life, I cannot expect to be able to obey Him as I should. This first warning passage tells me there will be eternal consequences for any misunderstanding of the Bible that I may have. As Dr. Constable’s *Notes* say, this is the mildest of the five warning passages.



Long-billed Curlew, Oyster Lake, Collegeport, Texas

Heb. 2:5-8. For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

“The world to come.” Heb. 1:14 tells us that angels minister to believers “who will inherit salvation.” The author wants to make sure that we know he is writing about the future. So he begins Heb. 2:5 speaking of “the world to come.” This is prophecy. At some time in the future, this world will not be ruled by Satan and his cadre of fallen angels, but by Jesus Christ. God is allowing this situation to exist to give time for more people to believe in Jesus Christ and believers to grow to spiritual maturity.

Then we have a quotation from Psa. 8:4. “What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him.” When David wrote Psalm 8, it sounded like he was talking about mankind as a whole. But from the implication here in Hebrews where Jesus Christ is the primary subject, we can see that this refers to Jesus Christ. When God created the world in the seven days of Genesis 1, a few thousand years ago, He created it to be ruled by mankind. Gen. 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” But Adam and Eve forfeited that rulership to Satan when they submitted to him by listening to his lies (Gen. 3:1): “Has God indeed said ...” (Remember Heb. 2:1, “We must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”) Satan deceived Eve by changing one small point of what God had commanded.

“The son of man that you take care of him.” Christ, the Messiah, is called the “son of man” in Dan. 7:13-14. “I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.” This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. All people, nations and languages do not yet serve Jesus Christ. This reference to “the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven” refers to the Second Coming of Christ, when Jesus will return to the earth to establish the Kingdom promised to Israel. Then all peoples, nations, and languages will serve Him.”

But Jesus, who is fully God, actually became a man and dwelt among us. When He returns, He will rule over the world, for a thousand years, and then for all eternity in “the New Heaven and New Earth” as prophesied in Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, and Rev. 21:1. So we have a wonderful (glorious) future in which a man, Jesus Christ, will rule the world and we will be a part of it.

I thank God for His prophetic word that is a comfort and encouragement to me when I see this world being turned upside down by” wars and rumors of wars” and all the other chaos round me. Jesus said in John 14:1-3, “Let not your heart be troubled” and followed it with the prophecy of His return for the Church, “I will come again and receive you to Myself.” Paul similarly wrote in 1 Thess. 4:18: “Comfort one another with these words.” This followed what he wrote about the Rapture that we will be “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”



**Scaled Quail, Christmas Mountain Oasis, near Terlingua, Texas**

Heb. 2:9-11. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Heb. 2:8 tells us that God the Father has “put all things in subjection under” Jesus Christ, “but now we do not yet see all things put under Him.” Now the writer confirms again that Jesus Christ, the eternal, sovereign, omnipotent God became like us, “a little lower than the angels.” He suffered death, just as we do, and was “crowned with glory and honor” at His ascension. He is now seated at the right hand of God. He is not yet ruling as king. He is ruling in my heart when I choose to obey Him. But I still have a sinful nature, and at times decide to follow Satan and disobey God’s word.

“That He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Jesus tasted “death for everyone.” He did not just die for a few special people called “the elect” that God in His sovereignty decided to save. I prefer to understand the word “everyone” in a literal sense. Literally, it means everyone without exception. I do not twist the meaning around to mean everyone without distinction as I have heard some preachers say. When they say everyone without distinction, they mean that this is everyone one of the elect without distinction as to race or any other classification.

The word “taste” here helps us understand the third warning passage in Hebrews. We sometimes use the word, “taste,” in the sense of sampling some item of food or drink. But the writer of Hebrews uses the word “taste” in the sense of fully experiencing it. Jesus died as my substitute. He didn’t just sample death to see if He wanted to go through with it. In the warning passage, Heb. 6:4, the writer again uses the word taste: “have tasted the heavenly gift, ... have tasted the good word of God ...” Again there are preachers who want to tell us that these people only tasted or sampled the heavenly gift and the word of God, but did not really believe. They were not truly saved. But that is not the way the author uses the word. The word “taste” in Heb. 6 means that these people were truly saved, just as Jesus here in Heb. 2 truly died.

How could Jesus who is eternal God and completely just and righteous in His deity be made perfect? This refers to Jesus’ humanity. Like Adam who was not created a sinner, Jesus was born without sin. But God gave both Adam and the humanity of Jesus the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey. In His humanity Jesus had to learn about God from the word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures. He then had to learn to obey what He had learned. He suffered during His life in every way imaginable. He had to continually choose to obey God’s word. Each time He chose to obey He was being perfected. This is the process of spiritual growth

. As believers, we grow spiritually in the same way Jesus did. We must learn what God wants us to do and to think through His word. Then we must obey what we have learned and apply it in our lives. When we do so, we will be perfected, growing spiritually.

Finally, in Heb. 2:11, “He who sanctifies” is Jesus. Jesus died that I might be set apart as one of God’s very own chosen or choice possessions. This He did through His death as my substitute. But also I am being sanctified (an on-going process of spiritual growth). I am being set apart in my life, as I choose to learn God’s word and to apply it in obedience to God.

Heb. 2:16-18. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

This has been a tough three verses to memorize and to remember. I think this is because the verses do not fit well in my grid of Bible understanding. So what is God telling me here?

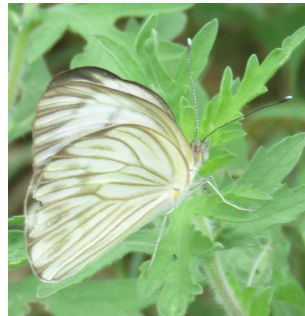
The writer of Hebrews is still comparing Jesus Christ with angels and showing that Christ is superior. Jesus “does not give aid to angels.” Jesus did not die for angels. Sometime in the past, and I think it was before the seven days of Creation in Gen. 1, Satan rebelled against God and one-third of the other angels chose to follow Satan in his rebellion. These fallen angels will be condemned forever into the Lake of Fire. Jesus did not become an angel and die as the substitute for angels, and thereby purchase the salvation of angels. But He did become a man and died in our place.

Jesus in His deity could not die. He had to become truly human like we are, and then He could die in my place. “In all things He had to be made like His brethren,” i.e. fellow mankind. Jesus in His humanity was fully human. But since He was born of a virgin, he did not possess a sin nature like the rest of humanity. He was like Adam and Eve before Gen. 3.

“That He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God.” A priest represents the people he serves before God. The New Testament teaches that each believer in Jesus Christ is a priest and can approach God directly in prayer and worship. 1 Pet. 2:5 says, “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Dr. Warren Wiersbe in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* describes the high priesthood function of Jesus this way. “As our High Priest, our Lord is able to give us grace to keep us from sinning when we are tempted. If we do sin, then He as our Advocate represents us before the throne of God and forgives us when we sincerely confess our sins to Him” (1 John 1:9). Rom. 8:27 also mentions the intercessory ministry of Jesus for us which is a High Priest function. “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is* because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.”

“To make propitiation for the sins of the people.” I don’t do Starbucks often. But the next time you order a fancy Starbucks coffee and you hand the barrista a twenty dollar bill, or more likely a piece of plastic, don’t tell her, “this is my propitiation” (i.e. payment). She might just dump the cup over your head! Preachers like to explain this five syllable word as being a satisfaction. Christ’s death on the cross in my place satisfied the justice of God as payment for my sins. Jesus’ death on the cross is the basis for His intercession for me when I sin.

Heb. 2:18 (“He is able to aid those who are tempted.”) is the important application for me. Jesus in His life on earth faced every challenge and temptation and much more than I will ever face. As I walk with Him step by step through life, in prayer, and daily knowing and applying His word, He is able to bring me through every trial and test that I will face. In His life on earth Jesus faced greater tests than I will ever experience. That is why His grace is there to aid me when I face any temptation or testing.



**Great Southern White, butterfly, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**



Heb. 4:11-13. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Heb. 4:12 is a familiar verse to many people. For thirty years I had a pastor who quoted this verse before every message. His purpose in quoting it was to emphasize the importance of God’s word in my life and the life of everyone who heard his teaching. This is certainly a true and an important principle. But this verse should also be considered in the light of its context.

The author of Hebrews began the subject of a rest for believers in the third chapter. He used Israel’s exodus from Egypt as an illustration of a future potential rest for believers. The Israelites had passed through the wilderness and were at the point of entering the land God had promised them. Moses sent twelve scouts (a better description I think than spies) to search out the land and determine the best way to enter. The story is familiar. Ten of the scouts came back and reported “we saw giants ... and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight” (Num. 13:33). These ten scouts lacked faith that God would keep His promise. They were able to convince most of the people not to obey God and enter the land.

The lesson for us is that we need to be diligent in our obedience to God’s word and His commands. We are saved (our eternal salvation by faith), now we need to walk by faith. We exercise this faith when we obey God’s commands, and also when we trust in His promises. Israel went through forty years of divine discipline because they lacked faith when they listened to the ten scouts and did not follow the example of faith shown by Joshua and Caleb. Whatever difficult situation I may face, God has made provision for it. I need to rest in God’s promises to take care of me. Notice that the author writes, “Let us ... .” He is including himself. This promised rest cannot be our eternal salvation and the forgiveness of sins since it is a rest that is given to us based on obedience.

Look at the way Heb. 4:11 ends, “lest any one fall according to the same example of disobedience.” Then look at Heb. 4:13, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Both verses 11 and 13 seem to be referring to judgment. Who is the “His ... Him” mentioned twice in verse 13? Does the context tell us who He is? To whom has God delegated all judgment? To Jesus Christ (John 5:22). When we are caught up together with the Lord in the clouds, Jesus Christ brings us to heaven. Then our lives in this world are evaluated to determine how well we have obeyed God’s word. Believers who have faithfully walked in obedience to the Lord will receive special rewards at this judgment.

When I fail to trust in God’s promises, I bring on myself the natural consequences of stress and worry to destroy the rest I could be enjoying. I also may incur divine discipline as Israel did in not being able to enter the Promised Land for forty more years. Finally, I could be missing out on a potential reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The idea of a future reward over and above possession of eternal life for faithful believers keeps coming up in Hebrews. I look forward to the promised return of Jesus Christ. Lord, let me be faithful in my obedience to Your word. Show me from Your word how I should live.

Heb. 5:6-9. As *He* also says in another *place*: “You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

“You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.” This is a quotation from Psa. 110:4. Jesus Christ is our High Priest and represents us to God. Every believer is also a priest as we are told elsewhere in the Bible. We can come “boldly to the throne of grace” as promised in Heb. 4:16. We do not need a third party, another person, to represent us as a priest. Under the Law God gave to Moses for Israel, the priests were to be from the tribe of Levi. Israel’s king was to come from the tribe of Judah. Under the Law given to Moses, the king and the priests were separated. But Christ is both priest and will be king. Melchizedek was also a king and a priest. In contrast to the Levitical priests each one of whom served only for a limited time, Jesus Christ is our High Priest forever.

The priesthood of Melchizedek preceded the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek. The story is found in Gen. 14. Gen. 14:18-20 says, “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tithe of all.” Abraham paying a tithe to Melchizedek is a descriptive statement of what Abraham did. But it is not a command that applies to us as to how we should give. The New Testament provides that “each one should *give* as he purposes in his heart” (2 Cor. 9:7).

Prior to His death on the cross for my sins, Jesus prayed to God “who was able to save Him from death.” But Jesus did die. So in what sense does this passage say that He “was heard”? God heard Jesus’ prayer and Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Many times in the New Testament Jesus’ resurrection is mentioned. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:14 without the resurrection my faith is empty.

Jesus in His deity was fully righteous. But in His humanity He also learned what it is like to be obedient to God when He had the ability to either choose to obey or to disobey.

“And having been perfected.” In His humanity, Jesus grew to spiritual maturity by obeying God through everything which He suffered. In Jesus’ humanity, He set the pattern or example that I am to follow in my life. Through the power of God the Holy Spirit and the word of God, I can live my life in obedience to God. When I do so, God is glorified.

“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” But Jesus said, “Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:15). Now Hebrews links eternal salvation with obedience! When I believed in Jesus Christ, God gave me eternal life just as Jesus told Nicodemus. But the author of Hebrews is telling me that there is a future salvation or deliverance that is above and beyond my presence eternally with God. This above and beyond is based on how I obey God in my walk with Him. How do I utilize the divine resources God provides through His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit so that I can live my life in obedience to God’s word?

Heb. 5:10-14. called by God as High Priest “*according to the order of Melchizedek,*” of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is,* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The writer begins the third warning passage in Hebrews. The first warning began in the Heb. 2:1, “we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away ...” If I pick up one false idea from TV or the internet or wherever, then it is easier to be misled by a second and a third and in this way to slowly drift away from God’s truth as taught in the Bible.

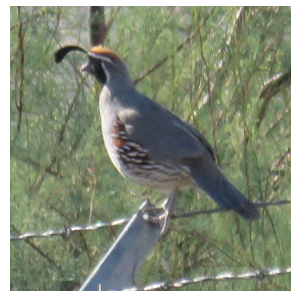
Here in Heb. 5:11 he tells his readers that they “have become dull of hearing.” He repeats the Greek word “dull” again in Heb. 6:12 where many English translations render the word “sluggish.” Both “dull” and “sluggish” are good translations. But when one Greek word is translated in different ways in the same context, we can miss the connection between the two verses. The author opens the warning with “dull (sluggish) of hearing” and wraps it up with “that you do not become sluggish” (dull).

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers.” Hebrews was not written to new believers. The author starts out from the beginning of this book quoting Old Testament passages (Heb. 1:5-13), Christ the Creator of this world (Heb. 1:2), Jesus’ session at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3), writing about angels (Heb. 1:6-7ff), Israel’s future Kingdom (Heb. 1:8), and more. I don’t regard these as simple subjects. He does not go into detail because he is writing to believers who already knew these things. In Heb. 5:11 he says of Melchizedek, “of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” Then in Heb. 7 he goes on to teach them about Melchizedek.

These Hebrew believers were being whip-sawed in their spiritual lives as they listened to the false ideas of their old Jewish friends who were telling them not to abandon their Jewish traditions. The same thing can happen to us as we listen to the thinking and philosophies of the world and various preachers who lean more on the traditions of men, than on what the Bible says.

These believers had become lazy or lackadaisical in their Christian lives. They had regressed to the point where they needed spiritual therapy to re-strengthen their spiritual muscles. They were listening to old friends who were encouraging them to return to their former Jewish worship. They needed to go back and review the basics of their Christian faith. Because of their need to re-learn the basics, they had lost the ability to discern between what is the true understanding of God’s word and what is false. Spiritually mature believers “have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” How well can I discern the true teaching of God’s word (“good”) from the false teaching (“evil”)?

The writer of Hebrews lists in Heb. 6:1-2 “the elementary *principles* of the Christ.” Then he quickly moves into the deeper things he wants his readers to know. The challenge for me is to keep on moving ahead with my reading and study of God’s word. I can only apply what I have learned. If I don’t know God’s word, then I will quickly revert to the false ideas I hear constantly from the world.



**Gambel’s Quail, Fort Leaton State Historical Park, near Presidio, Texas**

Heb. 6:1-3. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

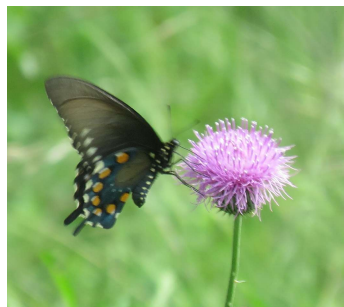
After writing that the Hebrew believers needed to go back and re-learn the milk of God’s word because they could not handle solid food since they had become dull of hearing, the writer tells them that he is not going to go through these elementary principles again. If I really want to advance to perfection, spiritual maturity, I need something more than just the basics of God’s word. The author outlines these elementary principles with three pairs of statements. Each of these pairs are best understood in the light of how a first century Jew would have understood them.

“Repentance from dead works and faith toward God.” In the Old Testament the Jews were told that when they strayed from following God, two things were required of them for the Messiah to come: They had to return to God (which is poorly translated in the New Testament as “repent”), and they had to keep the Law (Deut. 30:1-3). The Jewish believers to whom Hebrews was written were being tempted to return to the Jewish temple and ritual sacrifices which the author calls “dead works.” The Hebrew readers needed to repent or turn away from these sacrifices and keep their faith in Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

“The doctrine of baptisms and laying on of hands.” Note that this text does not say “baptism.” The word is plural, “baptisms.” We have the ritual of baptism (singular) and laying on of hands in our churches today as taught in the New Testament. But Jewish rituals also included numerous washings (baptisms, plural) and the Jewish temple sacrifices included the laying on of the participants’ hands on the sacrificed animals. This laying on of hands depicted the transfer of sins from the offeror to the animal. As believers, Jesus’ death paid the penalty for our sins. When we sin after believing in Jesus Christ, we need regular cleansing through the confession of our sins to God (1 John 1:9).

“Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.” This looks forward to future events. Knowing what God has told us by way of prophecy is part of basic Bible teaching. The Pharisees believed in a future resurrection. The Sadducees did not. Yes, Jesus was raised from the dead. I also will be resurrected if I die before Jesus returns for the Church in the Rapture (John 14:2-3). After that I will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I will be judged, not for my sins, to determine if I will spend eternity with God and not in Lake of Fire (Hell). But I will be judged for how well I utilized the divine resources God has provided for living the Christian life. These resources are God’s word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is a judgment for possible future rewards, not for the punishment that I deserve to receive.

“If God permits.” God will permit if He allows me enough remaining time in this life to advance to spiritual maturity. My days are limited. As it says in Col. 4:5, I need to “redeem the time” that God allows me to serve Him in this life. The Bible also warns against the possibility of a “sin unto death.” I may fall so far into a life of sin, that God will actually cut my life short. These warning passages in Hebrews leave the door open for God’s ultimate discipline of sinning believers with the “sin unto death.” I only have a limited amount of time in this life in which to advance to spiritual maturity. I need to use it wisely and redeem the time I have remaining.



**Pipevine Swallowtail, butterfly on Texas Thistle, Kerr (County) WMA, TX**

Heb. 6:4-6. For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

The writer gives us five descriptions of the people to whom he is giving this warning. He says of his readers:

- > They “were once enlightened.”
- > They “have tasted the heavenly gift.”
- > They “have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.”
- > They “have tasted the good word of God,”
- > “And the powers of the age to come.”

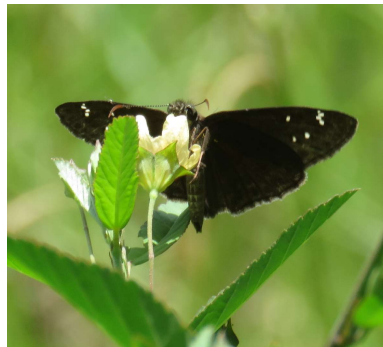
Twice in these descriptions the writer uses the word “tasted.” Because of the way we sometimes use the word “taste” today we may think that they only sampled these things. But back in Heb. 2:9 Jesus is said to “taste death for everyone.” Jesus did not just sample death. He completely died. So all of these descriptions in Heb. 6:4-5 are best understood as describing born again believers in Jesus Christ who have received the forgiveness of their sins and have eternal life.

“If they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.” The use of the word “if” in this statement is unfortunate. The Greek grammar is the same as it is in the preceding clauses. The *English Standard Version* gives a better translation, “And then have fallen away.” When we see the word “repent” we must consider the context in which it appears. Repent from what? In this context the Hebrew readers were being challenged by their unbelieving friends to return to their former temple worship with all of its animal sacrifices and useless attempts to please God by keeping the Law. To do this would be to say that Jesus’ death was meaningless. That He did not die to pay the penalty for their sins. But this passage describes them as believers in Jesus Christ. So even if they did fall away by returning to Judaism, they cannot be saved again because they are already saved. The solution is for these fallen away believers to confess their sin (1 John 1:9), and to turn (the meaning of the word “repent”) from it and stop crucifying Jesus Christ again on the temple altar and putting Him to an open shame.

When I believed in Jesus Christ, God gave me eternal life. If I can do something to lose eternal life, then that life was not eternal. If I have eternal life, it is forever. I cannot lose it.

Put another way, whatever I can do that would cause me to lose my eternal life becomes a work that I am required not to do if I want to be saved. But salvation is not by works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). My eternal salvation is a gift from God. God gave me eternal life. He keeps His promises. He does not give and then change His mind and take back that gift.

But there are many that would agree that I cannot lose my salvation that God has given to me. But that if I fall away from living the Christian life, then I did not truly believe in Jesus Christ in the first place. I did not have a true faith in Jesus Christ because if I did, then I would not have fallen away. But to say this also makes not falling away a work that I must not do if I want to be saved. My faith did not save me. I believed and God saved me. My eternal salvation is a gift from God.



**Clouded Skipper, butterfly, Liberty County, Texas**

Heb. 6:7-9. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned. But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

The author of Hebrews is completing the third warning passage and moves to an agricultural illustration to make his point. Believers who produce good fruit by obeying God’s word will be blessed. Those who do not, will be disciplined.

As a believer, I am constantly faced with choices. I can choose to live my life in obedience to God or I can choose to follow the ideas of the world and my sinful nature. When I walk with the Lord, I can expect blessing from God. Maybe not as much as I would like in the devil’s world, but certainly in eternity.

“For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.” The illustration is agricultural. God provides the farmer with rain. If the land produces herbs that are useful to the farmer, he is blessed. But if it produces thorns and briars, it is not useful.

When God cursed the world after Adam and Eve fell He said in Gen. 3:17-18, “Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.” Burning a field was a common agricultural practice from ancient times. Even today, we sometimes will see “controlled burns” being used to remove undesired vegetation.

“If it bears thorns or briars, *it is* rejected.” The Apostle Paul used the same word translated here as “rejected” potentially of himself in 1 Cor. 9:27, “But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” Paul had to continually discipline and train himself in his walk with the Lord that He would not be rejected or disqualified. Other translations of this Hebrews text render the word as “worthless” or “useless.”

How did farmers in the ancient world get rid of thorns and briars? They burned the fields, so that the fields would again be productive with good crops. Hebrews does not use the idea of burning as an allusion to the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire will not destroy those who end up there. It simply burns forever. The burning in Heb. 6:8 is to destroy the thorns and briars so that the earth can now produce herbs and good crops. In this illustration the earth is analogous to believers. Believers who fail to produce good fruit in their lives can expect to receive divine discipline from God, so that they can produce fruit.

Adam and Eve’s sin resulted in the cursing of this world. If I fail to obey, I also can expect discipline from God in the same way that a father will discipline a disobedient child. The burning here is not that of hell, but like a controlled burn of an agricultural field that had produced thorns and briars.

The author then concludes that he knows, “You guys will do the right thing. You will live out the salvation that God has given you. You will not return to the dead works of worship in the Jewish temple.”

For me, God has given me the Holy Spirit to guide me to the understanding of God’s word and the power to overcome my sinful nature. But I still have a choice. Will I learn God’s word? Will I choose to obey it? Will I make every decision in my life on the basis of what God’s word says?

Heb. 6:10-12. For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

These verses begin with another statement showing that the writer of Hebrews was addressing people who were believers in Jesus Christ. “God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name.” They were ministering to the saints and were continuing to do so.

One of God’s infinite attributes is His justice. These verses begin with a figure of speech, called a “litotes,” stating the reality of this attribute of God as a negative. “God is not unjust.” We know that God can never be unjust. By the author stating this in the negative, he is emphasizing this fact to us. If he had just written, “God is just,” we might quickly gloss over it. Also when this figure of speech is used, it does not mean that the opposite could sometimes be true. In this case, the author is not suggesting that at this time God is not unjust, but other times He may be. Take Rev. 3:5 as an example, “He who overcomes, ... I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life.” This verse is not saying that there is a possibility of a person’s name being blotted out of the Book of Life. If that possibility could exist, then our eternal salvation is not eternal. Also it would make salvation a matter of overcoming in our life, which is works. God saves us when we believe. We do not save ourselves by overcoming. God in His omniscient foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:1-2) wrote my name in the Book of Life in eternity past, before He even created this world. My name will never be blotted out of the Book of Life.

That is the assurance of hope that I can have throughout my life. All the way until the Lord takes me out of here, either by death or by being “caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16-17), I can have confidence that God will keep His promise of eternal life.

“Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” But the promises mentioned here are more than eternal life. The author keeps holding up a “carrot” to his readers. “Don’t go back into Judaism. Remain faithful to God and He will reward you.”

The author also repeats a word he mentioned in Heb. 5:11. In the earlier verse he said that his readers had “become dull (sluggish) of hearing.” Now he writes, “do not become sluggish (dull).” He has finished discussing the basics of the Christian faith. He goes on to more meaty subjects, like the priesthood of Melchizedek.

I have believed in Jesus Christ. God forgave my sins and gave me eternal life. I can never lose that. But how I live my life is important. I will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ and all my worthless deeds will be burned up and if there is anything left, I may receive a prize or reward. That is the potential promise to be inherited about which Hebrews is talking.



Hairy Woodpecker, San Augustine County, Texas

Heb. 9:11-14. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Christ is our High Priest. In the Old Testament it was God’s plan that the nation Israel should be a kingdom of priests. But because of Israel’s failures during the Exodus, events like the golden calf and constant complaining and others, God appointed the tribe of Levi to be priests. But today, every believer is a priest and can approach God directly. Christ, as our High Priest (according to the order of Melchizedek), makes intercession for us.

What is this “greater and more perfect tabernacle”? In the Old Testament the presence of God was with Israel in the tabernacle. In Rev. 21:3 the statement is made, “The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.” Revelation is referring to Jesus Christ as the tabernacle of God. It looks like this reference in Hebrews is describing the deity of Christ. Heb. 9:24 says, “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” So the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” appears to be Christ in heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God.

Heb. 9:11 also has one of those figures of speech that express a positive truth by stating a negative. “Not of this creation.” Christ as God is not of any creation. He has always existed. Christ as God is eternal. He was not created. The technical term for this figure of speech is a “litotes” with the “I” pronounced as the “I” in “lie.”

Jesus’ death on the cross was superior to the continuing sacrifices commanded to Israel in the Old Testament. Therefore, there was no need for these Hebrew believers to return to the formal rituals of Judaism as they were being pressured to do. What significance does this have for me today? The world is not pressuring me to return to animal sacrifices in some long-gone temple. But the world has many lies for me to chase after. “Do I really need to learn the Bible?” “Just keep the ten commandments and you will be OK.” “Each person can decide what gender it wants to be.”

Darwin wanted us to think that there were some races that were inferior to other races. Now because of the sinful acts of others in mistreating certain of Darwin’s “inferior races,” these “inferior races” now have the right to mistreat Darwin’s “superior races.” But the Bible says that we are all one race. We are God’s creation. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8).” That is God’s way. “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay” (Heb. 10:30). “Turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39). These statements are Bible truths.

For me today, I need to cease from the “dead works” of the world. I need to learn God’s word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and apply it in my life in my service to the living (the resurrected Jesus Christ) God.



Golden-winged Warbler, Quintana Neotropical Preserve, Texas



Heb. 9:26-28. He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

The subject is still Jesus Christ. Christ as our High Priest is superior to the Jewish system of priests. Jesus died once and paid the penalty for my sins and those of the whole world. In contrast, the Jewish priests had to continually offer sacrifices, and those sacrifices were never enough.

Heb. 9:27 is one I memorized seventy years or so ago from *The Navigators Topical Memory System*. Unless Jesus returns first for His Church, we all have an appointment with death. The author of Hebrews has moved on to the subject of prophecy. Prophecy is simply God’s promises to us as to what our future will be. Prophecy should be a comfort and an encouragement to us. But judgment does not sound like an event for which I am eagerly waiting.

But for me, as a believer in Jesus Christ, this judgment is like a graduation. Paul, in 2 Cor. 5:10, calls it the Judgment Seat of Christ. In 1 Cor. 3:11-15 Paul elaborated on this judgment when he described each person’s work as being tested by fire. Some works are “gold, silver, precious stones” and are not burned up. Whereas the “wood, hay, straw” are burned up. I can expect that if anything remains after this judgment fire that I may receive a reward. This fire, that burns up the “wood, hay and straw,” is like the grading of my final exam. 1 Cor. 3:15 clarified any confusion that may exist about this fire that burns up our works. “But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

But for an unbeliever, his judgment comes at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. Here the dead (unbelievers) will be judged out of the “books of works.” There is only one verdict rendered at this judgment. Rev. 20:15, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” As a believer, I will not appear before God at the Great White Throne Judgment.

In Heb. 9:28 the writer gives us a contrast between the “many” who avail themselves of Jesus’ sacrificial death on their behalf by believing in Jesus Christ, and “those who eagerly wait for Him.” The “many” are all who have accepted God’s gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This salvation was made possible by Jesus’ death. Among the “many” are those who have grown in their spiritual lives through learning and applying the truths of God’s word. These are said to eagerly wait for Jesus’ return. This is a work. I did not receive my eternal salvation from the penalty of sins, by my anticipation of Jesus’ return. I knew nothing of prophecy at that time.

“To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” The first part of this verse says “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” This refers to our eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. The second half refers to a different salvation. This second salvation is a prophecy for the future. The commentators are split as to whether this is the Second Coming of Christ or the Rapture. Hebrews is written from a Jewish viewpoint and it could refer to the Second Coming when “he who endures to the end (of the Tribulation) will be saved” (Matt. 24:13), that is, delivered into the Kingdom promised to Israel. It could also be referring to the Rapture and promises a special reward to those “who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). Both interpretations agree with other passages of Scripture. Since the future judgment of believers mentioned in Heb. 9:27 has to be the Judgment Seat of Christ, I lean toward the Rapture view.



**Bronzed Cowbird, Quintana Neotropical Preserve, Texas**

Heb. 10:19-22. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The author addresses his readers as “brethren.” He has done this previously. He considers them believers who have believed and received from God the gift of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is important to remember this as he begins this fourth warning passage in Hebrews.

“The Holiest.” This is a reference to the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament tabernacle and in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. When the people of Israel were faithful to God, the Shekinah Glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies. The Jewish high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year. But as believers today, who have believed in Jesus’ substitutional death on our behalf (“blood of Jesus”), we can approach God at will with our prayers. Jesus Christ is our High Priest.

“Full assurance of faith.” We are saved through faith; i.e. we believe and then God saves us. But that is only the beginning. I don’t see this “full assurance of faith” as some special faith that God gave me when He saved me. This is a continuing faith I should have in my daily walk as a believer.

I know I have eternal life, because I believe God and what He has promised (1 John 5:11-13). As Paul told the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). I don’t need to worry that I will persevere in living a life of good works to show that I had a real heart belief and not just some head belief that was not true faith.

I need to practice faith every day of my life. I need to obey God’s word. I need to think the way God has taught me to think from His word. I don’t want to think the way the world thinks.

I think of the choices two Christian families in Ukraine had to make when the Russians invaded in 2022. One was a married couple with no children. He was a member of a local guard in their town. He could not leave. She had the opportunity to evacuate but refused to leave her husband. She was given training in handling a machine gun and a grenade launcher. The second family had three children including a college age son. The father is a pastor. The college age son and the father would not be allowed to evacuate, but his wife and two younger children evacuated to Poland. There was no “right or wrong” in either of these decisions. But these were decisions that were made from a frame of reference created by knowing what God has taught us in His word.

Finally, in this passage the author gives two conditions for my walk in “full assurance of faith.” These are given in reverse order. He can reverse the order because his readers are assumed to be believers already. Figuratively speaking, their bodies have been “washed with pure water.” In the Old Testament when the high priest was ordained, he was completely washed, head to foot with water. When Peter responded to Jesus wanting to wash his feet, Jesus explained that Peter had already been completely washed, but would need periodic cleansing as in the washing of his feet. So do I when I sin, I need to have my conscience “sprinkled.” I take this as a picture of 1 John 1:9. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I cannot walk in “full assurance of faith” when I am harboring unconfessed sin in my life.



**Cooper’s Hawk, Katy, Texas**

Heb. 10:23-25. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This is a part of the fourth (out of five) warning passages in the book of Hebrews. These warning passages are understood by Bible believing Christians in one of three ways. The issue in understanding the five warning passages is: Are we saved by grace through trusting in Jesus Christ for our eternal salvation and forgiveness of sins, or are works involved in our eternal salvation. Two of the approaches to understanding Hebrews add an element of works to salvation.

Today, I am looking at this short snippet from a larger context. Each of us, as believers in Jesus Christ, have a responsibility to minister to other believers to support and help them in their spiritual lives. First, we must be faithful in our own walk: “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.” The Hebrew believers to whom this letter was written were being pressured by their unbelieving friends not to abandon the former sacrifices and temple worship of Judaism. As the warning passage in Heb. 6:6 says, they were putting Christ “to open shame.” So they were to hold fast their confidence of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

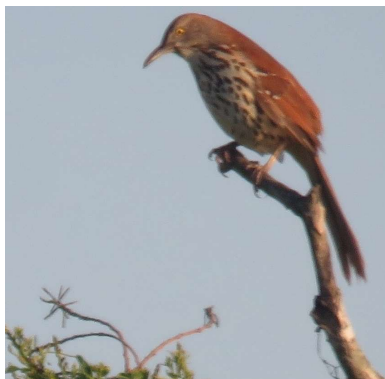
Hope is confidence in God’s faithfulness to fulfill His future promises given by way of prophecy. We have the prophecy of the Rapture that Jesus gave in John 14:3. When He said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am *there* you may be also.” Of special importance to the Hebrews addressed in this book of the Bible is the promise of Jesus’ Second Coming to establish the future Kingdom of Israel with Jesus ruling over the entire world.

Second, they were to encourage other Christian believers in their love for others and in good works.

Third, they were to do this by continuing to meet together with other believers. How could they encourage one another, if they were not assembling regularly with other Christian believers in worship? As believers we cannot grow in our spiritual lives without regular participation with other believers in a church. Apparently, some of the Hebrew believers were actually forsaking their assembling together in church since it says “as is the manner of some.” When Jesus returns for His Church in the Rapture, the works in our lives will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I do not want to be ashamed before Christ at His coming, about which 1 John 2:28 warns us.

Finally, the closer we come to the end of the ages (“the Day approaching”), the more important it is for us to assemble together with other believers. This approaching Day is the hope mentioned in the first clause of this passage, “the confession of our hope.” Throughout the New Testament, we see the hope and confidence that these first century believers had in the soon return of Jesus Christ.

What can I do to encourage other believers in their walk with the Lord? Am I so involved in the day to day events of my life, that I have lost sight of Jesus’ soon return?



**Brown Thrasher, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**

Heb. 10:26-27. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

This is the heart of the fourth warning passage in Hebrews and is the part that gives interpreters the most difficulty. At the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15, anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire. At the Judgment Seat of Christ in 1 Cor. 3:11-15, the works of believers (i.e. “gold, silver, precious stones,” and “wood, hay, straw”) are burned up. So just because a passage refers to fire, we should not jump to the conclusion that it is a reference to hell.

“For if we sin willfully ...” *Young’s Literal Translation* follows the Greek text more closely, “For we—willfully sinning ...” The word “if” does not appear in the Greek of this verse. Everyone of us at some time will deliberately sin. The writer is including himself in this warning. The context also clearly shows that the author is writing to believers. The judgment of hell is not in sight here for deliberate sinners.

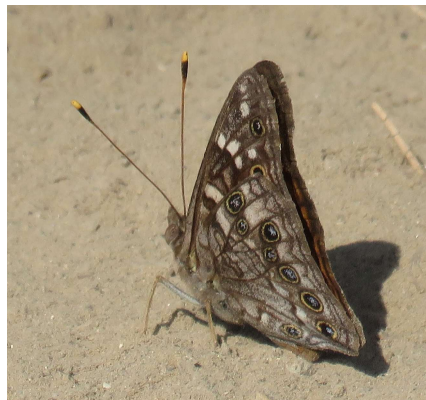
Bible translators understand that the original recipients of this message of Hebrews were believers, but they let their theology get in the way of their translations. “If we go on sinning ...” “If we keep on sinning ...” The implication of these translations is that a person who claims to have believed and continues to sin in his life, did not have true faith. He is not really saved. If this were so, then we are not saved through grace, but by the work of not continuing on in a life of sin.

“There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” In the previous chapter of Hebrews the author had discussed Christ’s sacrificial death which paid the penalty for the sins of everyone. Why would the Hebrew recipients of this message want to return to the ineffective Jewish sacrificial system? Jesus’ death on the cross in my place is the only sacrifice that is sufficient to pay for the penalty of sin. Why would these Hebrew believers want to return to the former sacrifices in the Jewish Temple? That is the specific willful sin of which this verse is speaking.

“Adversaries.” When I sin, I can expect to be judged. God may discipline me during my life on earth, and I can expect my works to be tested by fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The “adversaries” here in Heb. 10:27 would appear to be the people who were pressuring the Hebrew believers to return to the Jewish sacrifices. Divine judgment and discipline is coming to these false teachers and counselors.

The author gives his readers related commands in the context. Not to obey them also would be willful or deliberate sins.

- > “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). My walk by faith.
- > “hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” When I sin, I confess it to God and turn from it.
- > “hold fast the confession of *our* hope” (Heb. 10:23). I look forward to God’s prophetic promises.
- > “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25) I should be faithful in joining with other believers in worship.
- > “exhorting one another.” I have a responsibility to encourage other believers in their walk.



Empress Leilia, butterfly, Laredo, Texas

Heb. 10:28-30. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

The first of these three verses states a basic Old Testament principle upon which our judicial system is based: the importance of eye-witness testimony. Deut. 17:6 states: "Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." The application of this principle in my life is not to believe everything I hear. I want to hear it from two or more reliable witnesses and also to hear both sides of a dispute. Both Jesus and the apostle Paul repeated this: "two or three witnesses" principle.

I remember a discussion at an IVCF retreat when I was in college on the sixth commandment. We only used one Bible back then, which read in Exo. 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill." Some of the issues discussed were "Should we kill our enemies in war?" and "Should we execute murderers with a capital punishment sentence?" I don't recall that we came to a conclusion. Most of us had never thought of the commandment as our modern translations render it, "You shall not murder." This commandment does not prohibit capital punishment or killing on the battlefield.

"Of how much worse punishment ..." The author of Hebrews warns his readers again of future discipline if they depart from their faith in Jesus Christ. Notice particularly the author speaks of his readers as having been sanctified. Hebrews was written to believers in Jesus Christ.

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." The author quotes this verse from Deut. 32:35. God did this very thing to Israel when the nation was disobedient to God. The Northern Kingdom of Israel worshiped idols for a couple hundred years. God let the Assyrians take them into captivity. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, did not listen to the warnings of its prophets, worshiped idols, and failed to observe 70 sabbatical years. Judah spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon.

The Jewish leaders, along with the people they misled, rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 A.D. The Jews were scattered throughout the world. Their ultimate restoration in the promised Kingdom awaits their return to faith in Jesus Christ. Then Jesus will return to the earth to re-establish that Kingdom. Jesus prophesied this in Matt. 23:39. "For I say to you, you will see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

The people of Israel are still God's chosen people. God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as to David and to others. God will fulfill these promises. Jesus spoke of a sheep and goat judgment in Matt. 25:31-46. Heb. 10:30 repeats the warning, "The LORD will judge His people." The sheep and goat judgment determines who among those still living at the end of the Tribulation will enter the promised future Kingdom.

As a believer in Jesus Christ today, I will face a judgment or an evaluation of my life at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). In a more distant future, unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15.

Understanding these twists and turns of Scripture is not easy. I thank God that He has given me His word, so that I can know more about Him and what He has promised for my future.

Heb. 10:31-39. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Notice what the writer says about his readers. These statements point to the fact that he was writing to believers. He wasn't writing to unbelievers telling them how they can be saved.

- > "after you were illuminated." The word "illuminated" is translated "enlightened" in Heb. 6:4.
- > "joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods."
- > "knowing that you have a better and enduring possession for yourselves in heaven."
- > "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition." (Heb. 10:39).

For me (as well as to the original readers of this message), I have two choices. I can choose to disobey God and be unfaithful. For the original recipients of Hebrews this was the abandoning of worship with other believers and returning to the sacrifices and rituals in the Jewish temple. To this the author said, "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy" (Heb. 10:29). Since he was writing to believers who will not face punishment in eternity, this punishment can only be discipline during their lives on earth. They might even suffer the sin unto death which the author mentioned in Heb. 10:28.

The second alternative is to remain faithful in my obedience to God's word. Notice what had happened to the original readers. Some of them had lost all their material possessions because of their faith in Jesus Christ. They had accepted this loss with joy because they knew they had a better possession in eternity. If I am faithful in my walk with the Lord, I can expect a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, over and beyond just living eternally with God. This passage refers to this as a "great reward." In the United States we have not faced the persecution and antagonism the early Christians faced. But that is rapidly changing. Am I prepared to handle the future trials that are coming? "Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

While I received my eternal salvation as a gift from God when I believed in Jesus Christ, I now am also to continue to walk by faith. I am to continue to believe and to obey God's word. If I fail, I can expect discipline just as a father will discipline a child. If I remain faithful in my walk, I will deliver my soul into eternity to maybe receive an even greater reward beyond that of eternal life. I think this is what the author is telling us in the Heb. 10:39 in which he includes himself with the emphatic "we." "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."



Reddish Egret, South Padre Island Nature Center, Texas

Heb. 11:5-6. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11 is the chapter that tells of the faith of a few Old Testament saints. I first memorized Heb. 11:6 about seventy years ago. Our Bibles say that Enoch “walked with God.” The author of Hebrews quotes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew text called the Septuagint. This was translated some 300 years before Jesus was born and was the common Old Testament text used in Jesus’ day. So Heb. 11:5 reads that Enoch “pleased God.”

Enoch was the great-grandfather of Noah. Gen. 5:24 says, “And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him.” The general understanding of this verse is that Enoch did not die, but that God brought him directly to heaven. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* describes Enoch’s walk with God in this way: “‘Walk’ is the biblical expression for fellowship and obedience that results in divine favor.” By walking with God, Enoch pleased God as we are told in today’s verse. It was not simply that Enoch believed in God and then kept on doing his own thing. Enoch pleased God by living a life of faith.

The Bible tells us of another person who did not die, but God miraculously brought him directly to heaven. 2 Kings 2:11. Elijah and Elisha were walking together and Elijah had given his ministry over to Elisha. The verse tells us, “Then it happened as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up in a whirlwind into heaven.”

The Bible tells us of these spectacular events that happened to these two men of God in the Old Testament. They were faithful to God in their lives, even though they did not have the divine resources we have with a completed canon of Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who empowers our lives for God when we allow Him to do so. We live in a different time and God is administering His plan for the world today in a different manner from how He did in the Old Testament. With the completion of Scripture, we no longer need human prophets to pass on to us information that God wants us to know. God has given to us everything we need to know for life and godliness in His word. 2 Pet. 1:3.

While the angels rejoiced and God was pleased when I trusted in Jesus Christ for eternal life and the forgiveness of sins, the angels are still watching to see how I will use that gift of eternal life for God. Will I continue walking by faith in obedience to God?. God is pleased when we, as believers, choose to walk by faith in obedience to Him.

The author reminds me that if I do walk by faith and diligently continue to seek God and His will by obeying His commands that there will be a future reward over and above the promise of eternal life.



**White-eyed Vireo, Lafitte’s Cove, Galveston Island, Texas**

Heb. 12:1-3. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Hebrews 11 looked at many Old Testament saints who lived lives of faith in God. They are witnesses to us that when we continue to faithfully obey God, we can have victory in our own lives.

“Let us lay aside every weight.” What is it in my life that stands in the way of my faithful walk with God? Am I too busy to pray? Am I too busy to read and study God’s word? Do I have friends who encourage me in the Lord or are they always inviting me to share the pleasures of the world? Was I out late Saturday night and slept in on Sunday morning, the only morning when I can sleep late?

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” This athletic illustration is an example of how we should “lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us.” When athletes train for an event or for a game, it requires daily exercise. Sin obviously can be a hindrance to our spiritual growth. But also there are many distractions of life that can also get in the way.

Jesus began His ministry offering the promised Kingdom to Israel if they would repent or return to faith in God. They should turn from the mistaken idea that because they were descended from Abraham and kept the Law, that they were all right before God. Then in Matt. 12:24 The Jewish leaders, finally, totally rejected Jesus as their Messiah by accusing Him of doing the work of Beelzebub (Satan). From that time on, Jesus began speaking in parables and instructing His disciples about His future death and resurrection. In John 14-16 He taught us how we should live in this present age. Jesus’ life and ministry was fully focused on the mission for which God sent Him. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” The Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11 are great examples for us, but Jesus is the one we should follow.

We will never face the degree of pressure and opposition that Jesus faced. He remained faithful to the end. From childhood He had learned and studied the Scripture. He knew what God had promised.

All three of these verses (Heb. 12:1-3) mention “endurance” and “endured.”

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

“Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross”

“Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners.”

Endurance means that I stand firm in my faith in God. God’s word tells me everything I need to know to live a life that is honoring to God. Heb. 10:36 encourages us, “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”



Roseate Spoonbill, Baytown, Texas



Heb. 12:4-8. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I have choices to make. Will I obey God or will I sin? I am blessed to live in a free country that was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. Like these Hebrew believers in the first century, we have not reached the point where obedience to God’s word could lead to martyrdom. But that may come, if the current anti-biblical ideas I hear daily continue to increase. For these Hebrew believers who had successfully withstood the pressures to return to the Jewish sacrificial system, they had not yet faced martyrdom.

The author then quotes Prov. 3:11-12 and warns his readers not to forget the principle of divine discipline that can come as a result of sin. “My son do not despise the chastening (discipline) of the LORD.” There can be many reasons why Christians or anyone else may suffer. Sometimes it is simply natural consequences. If I run a red light and get a ticket. That is a form of deserved punishment arising from the sin of disobeying government authorities.

Other times God allows sickness, difficulties or hardships to happen to us. Job is an example. This comes to my mind quickly because my wife and I recently read the book of Job in our nightly Bible reading and prayer time together. Often this suffering is for the purpose of training us to apply God’s word and to obey Him.

This passage today has a third reason Christians may suffer. I may suffer discipline for failing to obey God’s word. Again remembering Job, this was the erroneous accusation Job’s friends made against him. When I fail to obey God’s word, I can expect discipline in the here and now.

The last sentence is interesting and a challenge to understand. “If you are without chastening (discipline) ...” Remember this is written to believers, so the “you” means “you believers.” “Of which all have become partakers.” He has just told us that we can all expect discipline as children of God, so “all” again means “all believers.” “Then you are illegitimate and not sons.” This sounds contradictory. Looking at the context and the flow of the author’s discussion, the author seems to be warning his readers that when a believer continues in sin through many divine spankings, that the divine discipline would cease. As Rom 1:24ff says about the sins that people commit, “God gave them up to ...” In the Roman and Greek culture illegitimate sons had no right of inheritance from their fathers. For a believer who is incorrigible, he risks losing his future inheritance at the Judgment Seat of Christ. As 1 Cor. 3:15 says: after all the wood, hay, straw are burned up, there is nothing left, “but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Thank you, Lord, for the times you have spanked me and for the challenges I have faced to apply your word in difficult situations. And, yes, I have also made more than my share of stupid mistakes and suffered the natural consequences for them.



**Northern Parula, Lafitte’s Cove, Galveston Island, Texas**

Heb. 12:9-11 . Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Why do Christians suffer? The first reason is that we live in a fallen world, ruled by Satan. The world has been corrupted by sin. The result is that bad things are going to happen. OK, I get that. But I have believed in Jesus Christ. Can’t God keep bad things from happening to me? Actually, I expect that He is doing that very thing. I just don’t see all the evil that God has kept away from me. 2 Thess. 2 has a prophecy about the future, but 2 Thess. 2:6-7 speaks of this restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit that is happening right now. “And now you know what is restraining, that he (the Antichrist) may be revealed in his own time. But the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.” At the return of Jesus Christ for believers at the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way and His restraining ministry in the world will cease.

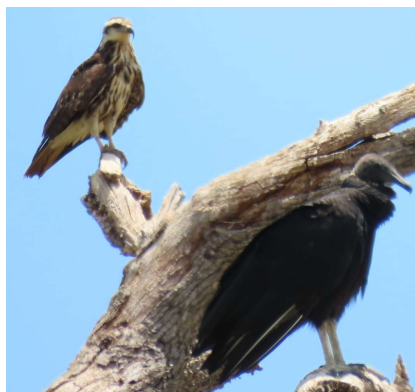
A second reason we suffer as Christians is because of our own mistakes. When we make bad decisions, there can be natural consequences for those decisions.

Heb. 12:5-10 is talking about a third reason Christians suffer. This is God’s discipline (called “chastening”) of believers who fail to obey Him. The author of Hebrews is continuing the analogy between God’s discipline of us as His children and with our human fathers disciplining us when we were young. As these verses say discipline is not a joyful experience. I remember one time when I was seven years old, I decided to run away. I made it to the end of the block. A dozen years later, I made it a little farther, and spent the night in a city park. Discipline never appears joyful. But provides an opportunity for us to learn.

After I grew up and became an adult, I realized that my parents’ discipline was an act of love. The same is true of God’s discipline of believers. I need to learn the importance of obeying God’s word. My parents’ discipline was a part of my training for life. God’s discipline is for the purpose of producing the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” in my life.

God’s discipline, when I am trained by it, has the promise of profit. I take this word “profit” as one of the many allusions in Scripture to the promise of a future reward in eternity over and beyond just the promise of eternal life with God. I want this training so that I can learn to live my life reflecting the character of God, i.e. as a “partaker of His holiness.”

A fourth reason Christians suffer is that sometimes God allows bad things to happen to us that we may learn to apply His word. James 1:2-4 speaks of this. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing.” Knowing and applying God’s word is the way we grow spiritually.



**Two plain birds: a Florida Snail Kite & Black Vulture, Lake Somerville, TX**

Heb. 12:12-14. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

The writer completes the athletic metaphor that began in Heb. 12:1, “let us lay aside every weight, ...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ...” For an athlete to compete successfully, he must train consistently. Living the Christian life is more than showing up for an hour on Sunday morning. I must learn God’s word so that I can think and respond to every situation in life as God would want me to think and respond. God gives me many opportunities every day to apply His word. God is my Trainer and His word is my coach, training me for spiritual growth in this life and for the role God wants me to fill in His kingdom and on into Eternity.

Heb. 12:12 quotes Isa. 35:3. “Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees.” Just as a runner needs strong knees and a wrestler or boxer need strong hands, so I must exercise my faith in God by decisions throughout every day in obedience to His word. I need to move straight ahead in achieving these goals and not be sidetracked.

A weak knee or a weak ankle may be further injured, or as it says here, “dislocated,” so an athlete trains to strengthen the knee or ankle so that it will not be injured in competition. As a believer in Jesus Christ, I train by studying God’s word, frequent prayer, and then choosing to do things God’s way and not my way throughout each day.

How do I strengthen the limp hands that hang down and the feeble knees? Through God’s word and prayer. Also as God gives us opportunity, we can help other believers to strengthen their limp hands and feeble knees. The author in Heb. 10:24-25 commands us, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ... but exhorting one another, ...”

“Pursue peace with all people.” *The Grace New Testament Commentary* identifies the “all people” here as other believers. Rom. 14:19 teaches the same idea: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” If these Hebrew believers were to leave the church and return to the Jewish sacrificial system, they would be disobedient to the command to pursue peace with their fellow believers. They would also lose out in the correct teaching of God’s word and the exhortation from other believers to encourage them in their walk.

They were also to “pursue ... holiness.” “Holiness” can also be understood as “sanctification.” The basic idea is being set apart or dedicated to a particular service or function. I take this as a command to remain faithful in following Jesus Christ and not putting Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6).

In the immediate context of this verse, Heb. 12:10 warns us that God chastens or disciplines believers that we may be partakers or sharers in God’s holiness. In this sense holiness is our progressive sanctification or spiritual growth as believers. This would not happen with these Hebrew believers if they abandoned worship with other believers by returning to the sacrifices in the Jewish temple. By doing this they would be forsaking the assembling of themselves together with other believers (Heb. 10:25). We need to heed this warning and not fall into the trap of not assembling with other believers.

Heb. 12:15-17. looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

“Lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” God has dealt in grace with me by forgiving my sins and giving me Jesus’ perfect righteousness. I need to treat my friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and anyone else with whom I come in contact with grace. Dr. Tom Constable’s *Notes* (a Dallas Seminary professor) sees this statement in this light. He did not see it from the viewpoint of failing to receive God’s grace because a person failed in pursuing peace and holiness (Heb. 12:14). I have received grace from God, now I need to treat other people with grace.

“Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” When I am not treated fairly or am wronged in any way, do I become bitter or hold a grudge? Do I try to get even and cause more trouble? When we harbor bitterness or a grudge in our hearts, this will overflow in our relationships with other people who had nothing to do with the initial wrong done to us. As Heb. 12:14 says, “Pursue peace with all people.”

It is easy to misunderstand what the writer is saying here when he writes, “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau.” Nowhere in the story about Esau in Genesis are we told that he was guilty of fornication. Kenneth Wuest in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* writes, “The word is not to be taken here as descriptive of Esau, however, he is described as a profane person.” The word “profane” “means ‘profane, unhallowed, common.’ It has the opposite meaning to ‘holy, set apart, consecrated.’” Israelites in the Old Testament were guilty of fornication when they followed the example of their neighbors and worshiped their neighbors’ foreign gods. This worship of foreign gods included participating with the cultic prostitutes.

Esau lost his inheritance when he sold his birthright for a morsel of food treating it as a common commodity that could be bought or sold. The inheritance rules were laid out in the Old Testament law. Esau selling of his inheritance was a violation of God’s law. If these Hebrew believers returned to the sacrifices in the Jewish Temple, they risked losing their inheritance that would come in the form of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Esau was a man who when he wanted something, he wanted it now. He came home and was hungry. He sold his birthright to Jacob for one “morsel of food.” He made a deal and he could not back out of it. I need to watch what I promise. When I say I will do something, I need to be sure to do it.

The New Testament word that we translate “repent” or “repentance,” as well as its Old Testament equivalent, both mean to “change your mind.” In the Old Testament the translators often render the word correctly as “turn.” 1700 years or so ago Jerome mistranslated the New Testament word we translate as “repent” into the Latin with a word meaning to “do penance.”

The Roman church by the fourth century had already mixed faith and works together as the means of salvation. The Latin word used by Jerome then came down to us in English as our word “repent.” So in Hebrews the author said that Esau “found no place for repentance.” He could not change his mind. He could not change the deal that he had previously made with Jacob. Even if he added tears to that “repentance,” he could not change the agreement he had made. Sorrow and tears are not a condition of Biblical repentance.

Heb. 12:22-24. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Years ago, I read this and asked myself what is the author talking about? Then I had an opportunity to ask my pastor and he gave me a brief explanation, certainly not detailed. Understanding this passage is helped if we know the Old Testament background as well as the future prophetic events God has promised to us.

In Heb. 12:18-21 the writer had written about Mount Sinai where God gave the Law to Moses. In contrast we have “come to Mount Zion.” Mount Zion is where Jerusalem is located, called here “the city of the living God.”

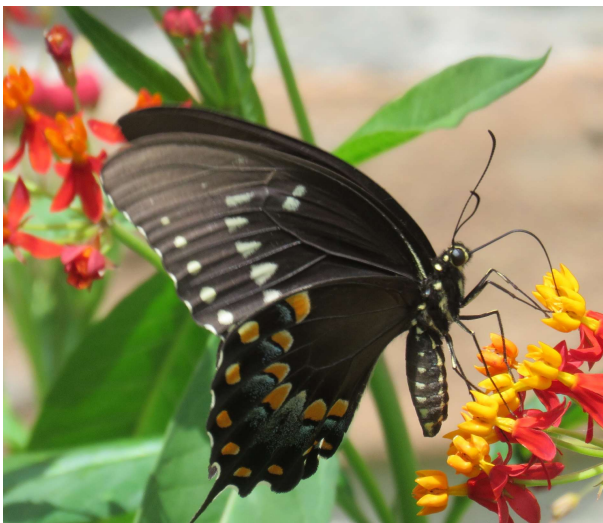
Who is the “living God”? Don’t miss this reference to Jesus Christ. Calling Him the “living God” is a reminder of His resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection was of great importance to these early Christians. Since Jesus was raised from the dead, we can know that we will be raised also.

In Hebrews 11:10, the author wrote of Abraham that “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” In today’s verses we have come “to the city of the living God.” Rev. 21:2 says, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ...” Is this just some vague, allegorical reference to heaven, or can we understand this as a literal city that will exist in the new heaven and new earth, mentioned in the prior verse in Revelation? I suggest that this is a reference to the eternal city of Revelation 21 and 22.

God has told us about our future. We call these promises for our future with God “prophecy.” God gave me these prophetic promises to be a comfort and an encouragement to me when I encounter hardships and sufferings in the world.

Hebrews calls this city the “heavenly Jerusalem” because it is in heaven now. Revelation tells us that it will come down from heaven into the new heaven and the new earth.

For the original recipients of this message, we call Hebrews, the author warns them not to return to their former Jewish worship by sacrifices. He reminds them of the first sacrifice made by a person recorded in the Bible, that of Abel. He also mentions “God the Judge of all.” Even as a believer in Jesus Christ who has eternal life that I cannot lose, I still will have my life evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. How I live my life is important.



**Spicebush Swallowtail, butterfly, Houston, Texas**

Heb. 12:25-29. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire.

The book of Hebrews continues its many references to the Old Testament. Numbers 26 tells the story of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses and the Lord. Num. 26:31-33 describes the earthquake which destroyed them. "Now it came to pass, as he (Moses) finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their goods*. The earth opened up and swallowed Korah and those with him. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly." Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who knew the Old Testament well and what the writer of Hebrews was saying. Korah and the others received the ultimate sentence of divine discipline on earth, the sin unto death.

The author then quotes from Hag. 2:6, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Haggai is looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation and the establishment of Israel's promised Kingdom. At that time the unbelieving armies of the world under the Antichrist will be destroyed. Any living survivors will be judged at the Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matt. 25:31-46 to determine who may enter into this promised Kingdom.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." This is the author's prayer for the Hebrew believers, but it also applies to us. If we fail to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, we can expect divine discipline as he warned in Heb. 12:5-10. God has spoken to me with His word, the Bible. Do I think I can escape God's chastening if I do not learn from the Bible how God wants me to live? Or when I do learn, to deliberately disobey God's word? Then why do I disobey?

This concludes the fifth and final warning passage in Hebrews. The passages do not warn us, as believers, that if we fail to obey God, that we can lose our salvation. God saved us when we believed in Jesus Christ. What God has done cannot be undone. As Jesus said in John 10:27-28, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hands."

Constable's *Notes* comments: "Many Reformed interpreters take this warning in Hebrews 12, and the other warning passages, as warnings to persevere in Christianity, but they make perseverance a condition of salvation." Then he quoted, Dr. A. W. Pink before concluding, "This, to me, adds works (perseverance) as a condition of salvation."

The best way to understand the warning passages in Hebrews is that believers who fail to heed the warning or may otherwise disobey God, may face divine discipline during their lives, and potential loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Failure to obey and persevere does not mean that we can lose our salvation or that we never had true saving faith. Both interpretations turn salvation by God's grace into a works based salvation.

Heb. 13:1-2. Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

“Let brotherly love continue.” The Bible has two Greek words that are translated into English as “love.” “Love in this verse is properly rendered “brotherly love.” Love in whatever nuance we want to describe it is an essential virtue that is required of me as a believer in Jesus Christ. We should have this brotherly love for all people.

The last night Jesus spent with His disciples, He told them in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is the other Greek word for love.

Paul wrote in Gal. 5:14-15, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

These commands set a high hurdle for me to keep in my life. Personalizing Paul’s statement in Phil. 2:4, “Let me look out not only for my own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” Reading Hebrews tests our recall of the Old Testament. Who in the Old Testament unwittingly entertained strangers? Abraham had three visitors in Gen. 18. He welcomed them and asked Sarah to prepare dinner for them. Gen. 18:1-3 calls one of the men the LORD, i.e. the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. “Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.’” Although the text identifies one of these men as the Lord, Abraham, at this point, saw them simply as travelers. As the story develops we realize that two of them are angels and one is the Lord.

While I don’t expect that I will ever encounter an angel in the guise of a human being, the author’s point is that I should show hospitality to others. Doing this is an example of Christian love. The New Testament refers to a spiritual gift of hospitality. 1 Pet. 4:9 commands us: “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” Rom. 12:13 says, “distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” The contexts of both of these passages discuss spiritual gifts.

Thomas Constable’s *Notes* suggests that the root idea of the Greek word for angel is that of a messenger. He points out that missionaries and visiting preachers bring messages from God. Certainly, it is appropriate to extend hospitality to them when we can.

My wife and I have had many opportunities to entertain missionaries and others over the years. May the Lord continue to allow us to do so. 3 John 5-8 speaks of showing hospitality to Christian workers. “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.*”



**Spotted Sandpiper, Lake Tawakoni, Texas**

Heb. 13:5-8. *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.* For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Nine of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 are repeated in the New Testament. This passage refers to the tenth commandment, which I think of as the “stealth commandment.” We all know that this tenth commandment says, “Thou shalt not covet.” But it is often ignored. Heb. 13:5 does a good job of defining coveting for us, or rather how to avoid coveting, “Be content with such things as you have.” There always seems to be something more that we want: A fancier car, a bigger house, the most up-to-date clothes in the latest styles, one more trinket for my collection.

I don’t have the money right now to buy xyz, but I can charge it to my credit card and pay for it later. So we borrow money and end up spending more for the new things we want than if we had waited until we could pay cash for them without borrowing.

The author of Hebrews quotes Psa. 118:6 writing, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” Back in Heb. 10:34 he reminded his readers that they had “joyfully accepted the plundering of your (their) goods.” Suffering and persecution should be the expected result of living faithfully for God. Our trust in God makes us an enemy of the world and of all the unbelievers around us. So the command, “Be content with such things as you have.”

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow.” I am to remember what my pastors have taught me in the past. Some of them are with the Lord now. Just as they were faithful in their lives, I need to be faithful to the Lord in my life.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” God is unchangeable, immutable. But how does this verse fit in this context? The author is reiterating the idea in Heb. 2:3. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*.” Bible teachers must teach God’s word, as Jesus did, and not the ideas of the world. I have heard many differing ideas from various preachers in the past. But God has given me His unchangeable word in the Bible. When I hear something new, how does it line up with what the Bible says? That is the challenge I face. The truth is in God’s word.

A Pentecostal friend one time quoted Heb. 13:8 to me as evidence that the spiritual gifts of tongues and miracles in the early years after Jesus’ resurrection are still active today. But to the Hebrews, the author was reminding them what their pastors had previously taught them was still true. They did not need to return to the old Jewish sacrifices. Jesus had paid the penalty for their sins by dying in their place. And contrary to what my Pentecostal friend had said, this verse has nothing to do with spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul had already explained in 1 Cor. 13:8 that there would come a time when some of the early spiritual gifts would come to an end. Paul wrote, “Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.”



**Western Tanager, South Padre Island Nature Center, Texas**



Heb. 13:9-12. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the camp.

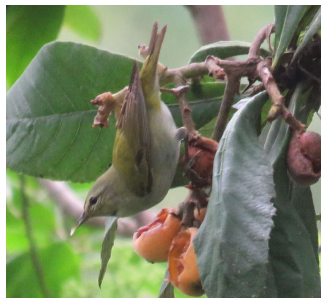
Following the command of Heb. 13:7 to “remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you” the author warns his readers against false teachers. “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.” Going from Old Testament Judaism to New Testament Christianity was a major reset for these Hebrew believers. The “various and strange doctrines” they faced were critical issues for them. For us today, the questions we face are different. Paul told us that we were not under the law (Gal. 5:16), but some teach that we should keep at least some of the law. Does Sunday worship by Christians replace Old Testament Sabbath rest? Does baptism replace circumcision? Should Christians tithe or “let each person give as he purposes in his heart,” as Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 9:7? Sabbath rest, circumcision, and tithing are a part of the Old Testament Law, but are not prescribed for Christians today. God gave us the entire Bible, but we need to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). I need to know what the Bible says, and then make correct application of it. “It is good that the heart be established by grace,” not with the legalism of the Pharisees.

The basic test for these Hebrew recipients was grace. Keeping the law and all its animal sacrifices was not the way of salvation, the way to receive forgiveness of sins, or the way to receive blessings from God. My heart (my thoughts and way of thinking) needs to be built on grace. My salvation is a grace gift from God. I was a sinner before I believed in Jesus Christ and I remain a sinner today. Not too long ago, I heard Dr. J. Vernon McGee on the radio. He said something to the effect that not a day goes by that everyone of us does not sin. How many sins does a person have to commit to show he is not a believer? Alternatively, how many good works does a person have to do to prove he truly believed in Jesus Christ? Why do so many Bible teachers today add an element of works to their gospel messages?

The Old Testament dietary laws should not be an issue for Christians; i.e., “not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” But neither are any of the 613 laws God gave to Israel through Moses.

“We have an altar (Jesus Christ) from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” Without believing in Jesus Christ, there is no fellowship with God. Dr. Constable’s *Notes* comments on this verse: “Believers under the Old Covenant ate part of what they offered to God as a peace offering (Lev. 7:15-18). However believers under the New Covenant feed spiritually on Jesus who is our Peace offering.” God’s word is our spiritual food by which we grow in our Christian lives.

“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the camp.” Why continue to sacrifice animals? The Old Testament sacrifices picture Jesus’ sacrifice for the sins of all people. The high priest each year would bring the blood of the sacrificed animal into the Holy of Holies, but the bodies of the sacrificed animals were burned outside the tabernacle or temple. Jesus Christ died on the cross, once for all, outside the gates of Jerusalem.



Tennessee Warbler, Houston, Texas

Heb. 13:13-16. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” In the immediate context, in Heb. 13:11, we have the bodies of the sacrificed animals “burned outside the camp.” Then in Heb. 13:12, Jesus is said to have “suffered outside the gate.” The author is using the word “camp” to refer to the Jewish worship in the Jerusalem Temple. It is time for these Hebrew believers to separate themselves from this worship, even though it would mean suffering reproach. They are to stand firm in their faith in Jesus’ sacrifice for them, even though they would be suffering reproach and condemnation.

The apostle Paul gave the Corinthians a similar command in 2 Cor. 6:17. Only in this case, it was to separate from their former worship practices in the pagan idol temples. “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”

When my parents moved to Houston in 1938, they had difficulty finding a church that taught God’s word. They had been Presbyterians all their lives. All the churches they visited had what they called liberal ideas about the Bible. They finally found a Baptist church which still believed the Bible. They ended up separating themselves from their old churches to go with one faithful to God’s word.

“Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” The author reminds his readers of two prophecies which they had been taught. “No continuing city” reminds them of what Jesus said about Jerusalem in Luke 19:43-44, “For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Daniel had also prophesied in Dan. 9:26, “And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” This destruction of Jerusalem occurred in 70 A.D. “The one (city) to come” is mentioned previously in Heb. 11:10 when it tells us about the faith of Abraham, “For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Also Heb. 12:22, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Rev. 21:2 also speaks of this New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven.

In comparison to the Jewish sacrifices of animals, as a believer in Jesus Christ, I have my own sacrifices to make. “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.” Other translations say, “confessing his name” or “acknowledging His name.” I am praising God when I tell others what God has done for me. Heb. 13:16 adds, “Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

Christian giving to help other believers in need is one of the sacrifices that are expected of us today. The apostle Paul had sharing in mind when he wrote Eph. 4:28, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands, what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”

Rom. 12:1 tells us that our entire lives are to be a sacrifice to God. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which* is your reasonable service.”

James 1:1-4. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James identifies himself as “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” By including both Jesus and God the Father in this statement, he places the two on an equal footing. Jesus is as much God as is God the Father.

“To the twelve tribes ...” James is writing to Jewish believers who have fled Jerusalem and Judea because of persecution. There is no reason to over-think this address to mean anything other than that he was addressing members of the twelve tribes of Israel who were also believers in Jesus Christ. We sometimes hear references to the “ten lost tribes.” This refers to the ten tribes that comprised the Northern Kingdom, which split off from Judah during Solomon’s reign. But God’s promises in the Old Testament are to all twelve tribes. God knows who and where they are.

“My brethren.” James uses this form of address fifteen times in this letter. He is writing to fellow believers in Jesus Christ. His purpose is to tell them how they should live as believers, not how they can be saved from the penalty of sin and receive eternal life. James uses the word “save” five times in this letter. The fifth time is in James 5:15 where it refers to the sick being healed. The other four times, do not tell the readers how to receive eternal salvation, but how to live their lives in a way that is pleasing to God. Those who do will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Although James 1:12 does not use the word “save,” it presents the possibility of a believer receiving “the crown of life.” The verse says, “Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

James begins by reminding his readers of something they already know: “knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” This epistle was one of the earliest books of the New Testament to be written, and may actually have been the first. The scattered Jewish believers had been taught verbally by the early apostles and leaders of the church. I am blessed to have the completed Scripture. I need to learn God’s word and to apply it.

These Jewish believers were refugees from the persecutions in Jerusalem and Judea and undoubtedly were facing hardships and problems where they were now living. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will face persecution.” God has told me how to respond to hardships, difficulties, persecutions and whatever in His word. I need to trust God and to obey Him in faith. By doing this, I can grow toward spiritual maturity. As James says, “may be perfect and complete.”

“That you may be perfect and complete.” This is the idea of spiritual growth. We can never reach the point of absolute perfection. As 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” The process of spiritual growth involves first learning God’s word. Then when we face the various trials of life, we apply the word to each situation. We need to continually repeat this process during our entire lives.



**Canyon Towhee, Lake Pueblo State Park, Colorado**

James 1:5-8. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

I remember one time when I was in college and had a big exam coming up. At a meeting of the youth group I made a prayer request for wisdom for the exam! I was misapplying this verse from James. I needed recall of the knowledge of the material I had studied in the course to answer the exam questions correctly. The wisdom this verse has in mind is how to apply knowledge of God’s word to real life situations, i.e., the trials of James 1:2. Wisdom is the ability to make reasoned application of what we have learned.

Let’s look at another example from that era in my life. In my senior year in high school I applied to six colleges for admission and was accepted by two. I was uncertain which way to go since these two schools were at the bottom of my list of choices. My college counselor suggested a seventh college. That one sounded good. I applied and was accepted. Away I went. There was no right or wrong answer to my choice of college. But I had a set of criteria in my mind about where I would like to go to college. Those criteria constituted a framework of wisdom that I had applied to the situation, but looking back I can see that I had a lot to learn. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” as Solomon wrote in Prov. 16:9. I had planned to go to one of the six colleges. In hindsight I can say that the seventh was a better choice and that was the Lord’s doing.

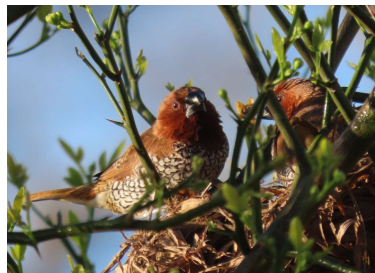
The wisdom this prayer addresses is the ability to make a good decision. “Let him ask in faith.” Not blind faith. Blind faith is an oxymoron. Faith requires an object. For believers in Jesus Christ our faith is in God. This includes faith in God’s word. I have to know what God’s word says if I want to make good decisions based on it. I need wisdom to make those good decisions if I want to correctly apply God’s word. But God does not answer this kind of prayer with a hypodermic needle giving us a shot of wisdom. God provides us with Bible teaching from our pastors. Then He allows trials to come our way, giving us the opportunity to apply what we have learned of His word. This can be an on-going repetitive process until we can finally get it right. Then the process may repeat with new trials.

The world is full of ideas of right and wrong. Not all of them agree with the Bible. I don’t want to be whip-sawed in my thinking between the ideas of the world and what God has told me in the Bible.

The world is telling me that we are destroying the world through climate change. God has said in 2 Pet. 3:12, “the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.” God has said that the world will remain and continue to exist until He destroys it by fire. The world says, “But temperatures are rising and we have more hurricanes and the ice cap will melt and the world will be flooded.” So I ask:

“How did Greenland get its name?”  
When my wife’s Scandinavian ancestors visited Greenland 1,000 years ago it was not a land of glaciers and ice, but a verdant green country. So they called it Greenland. Worldwide temperatures were even higher 1,000 years ago than they are now.

Let me single-mindedly learn God’s word and not be double-mindedly whipsawed by the world’s way of thinking.



Scaly-breasted Munia, Houston, Texas

James 1:12-15. Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The word “temptation” in James 1:12 is a translation of the same Greek word that in James 1:2 is translated “trials.” In James 1:3 James wrote, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” The word “approved” in verse 12 is saying that the believer who has passed the trial or temptation will receive the “crown of life.” The crown of life is also mentioned in Rev. 2:10. The verse describes the suffering and tribulation the church in Smyrna will face and says “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” This crown is one of the rewards faithful believers may receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

“Let no one say when he is tempted ...” “Why do bad things happen?” We look around for someone to blame. God is not the source of trials and temptations. We live in a world ruled by Satan and we ourselves are born with a sinful nature. People who blame God are pointing their fingers in the wrong direction. God allows these things to happen to us to mature us in our faith, but He does not cause them. As 1 Cor. 10:13 says, “God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.” God is in total control. He expects us to apply His word in faith.

We can’t even blame Satan. For James 1:14 says, “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” We live in a fallen and corrupt world. We may face circumstances and situations over which we have no control. How do we deal with these? We may initially react with anger, distress, depression, a desire to get revenge, hate for the perpetrator, or in any number of other sinful ways. The temptation is not a sin. What we do with it may be.

The apostle Paul gave good advice to the Ephesian church about how to handle a situation that produces anger. Eph. 4:26. This command, “Be angry, and do not sin.” Dr. Charles B. Williams in *The New Testament in the Language of the People* rendered this difficult to translate command in this way: “If you do get angry, you must stop sinning in your anger.” When something bad happens to us and we have an initial reaction of anger, which is a temptation or a trial, we need to cut the anger short. As most translations render the next clause, “Do not sin.” When I do that, I will have passed the test.

“Sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.” Death is a separation. The Bible speaks of different kinds of death. At our physical death, our physical bodies are separated from our immaterial souls.

Rom. 6:2 refers to a death people experience when they believe in Jesus Christ. “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” These believers are still alive; but having been born again, they are separated from the slavery to sin they experienced as unbelievers.

1 John 3:14 expresses a kind of death when it says, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother, abides in death.” This is not physical death. It also is not eternal death in the Lake of Fire because these people are still physically alive. Their obedience to God in loving the brethren confirms what Paul wrote in Rom. 6. They are no longer slaves of their sinful natures. When they sin by failing to love a brother, they experience another kind of death. This is a separation from fellowship with God with which John opened this letter in 1 John 1:3. James 1:14 uses death in this same sense for a believer who sins. “Sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.” Sin separates us from our fellowship relationship with God.

James 1:16-18. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

“Do not be deceived.” In James 1:13 we are told that God is not the source of temptations and trials. Was that what the Jewish believers were hearing from some false teachers? False teachers are still around today and have even proliferated. I need to be watchful that what I hear aligns with what the Bible says, not just a tradition of men without a Biblical basis.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights.” James is reinforcing that God is not the source of our trials and temptations. He calls God “the Father of lights.” God created the sun, moon and the stars. This also brings to mind 1 John 1:5. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” So even before God made the sun, moon, and stars in Gen. 1:14-18, He could say in Gen. 1:3, “Let there be light.”

“With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” The stars rotate through the night sky as the earth turns and rotates around the sun. The moon also rotates around the earth and occasionally results in an eclipse. In contrast God does not change. The fancier word is God is immutable.

“Of His own will.” Another of the attributes of God. He is sovereign. Yes, in eternity past, before God created the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1, He wrote the play book that we are following. But this is not the mid-eastern fatalism that Augustine imported into Christianity when he converted from Manichaeism to the Roman Church. Augustine’s fatalism focuses on God’s sovereignty and minimizes God’s other divine attributes. There are many who still teach Augustine’s fatalism today. God is just and righteous. He is also omnipotent. God created man in His own image. In doing so, God gave us the ability of self-determination. We have the ability to choose to believe in God. But our believing or faith does not save us. When we believe, God has promised to save us. Yes, in eternity past, when God wrote the play book we are acting out, He knew what He was doing. He is omniscient.

“He brought us forth by the word of truth.” I heard the gospel back in a Baptist church seventy-five or so years ago. I believed. Then I was born again by God. God saved me.

“Might be a kind of firstfruits.” James did not say that as a believer that I am one of the firstfruits or that the Jewish believers to whom James was writing were the firstfruits of many who would follow by also believing. The word “might” has the idea of potentiality, as do other translations that say “should” or “would.” This does not sound like fruits that are first in time with other fruits to follow. Dr. Constable’s *Notes* mentions from a Greek lexicon that the word “first fruits refers to what is first in honor.” This idea also follows from the context that speaks in James 1:12 of the blessedness of a believer “who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life.” This “crown of life” is promised to believers who endure temptations and is rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Maybe I will be one of these firstfruits of honor if I am successful in enduring the temptations and trials of life by applying God’s word to these trying circumstances. I fail to do this too many times.



**Tricolored Heron, near Floresville, Texas**

James 1:19-22. So then (Know this), my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

The Greek manuscripts begin James 1:19 in two different ways because of what is called a textual variant among the manuscripts. Rather than beginning the verse with “So then,” the *English Standard Version* and *NetBible* begin it, “Know this” or “Understand this.” Both translated as commands.

James gives us two commands in this verse. First, we are to know something. The second command is that we should do three things: (1) We should be “swift to hear” the teaching of God’s word. (2) Then when we are faced with trials and tests in our lives, we should be slow to speak, and (3) slow to wrath.

James wrote in James 1:2, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, . . .” He continued in James 1:12, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation” (trial). Now he tells us how to respond to the many trials we face day by day in life.

“Let every man be swift to hear.” Number one, first of all, above all else, listen to what the God’s word teaches. Listen to the advice of godly people, particularly those who have taught you the word of God.

“Slow to speak.” A lot of times when we face a problem we start talking. We complain, grumble, and even become angry. “Slow to wrath.”

“Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.” John said a similar thing in his own way in his first letter, (1 John 1:9), “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We need to confess our sins and turn from them. Then we can be “swift to hear.” Both James and John are speaking of the same spiritual function. Once we have confessed our sins, laid them aside and are now walking with the Lord, then we can: “Receive with meekness the implanted word” fulfilling the first part of the command, “be swift to hear.” To “receive with meekness” is to be teachable. The “implanted word” is the word of God we have learned and made it a part of our lives.

This produces a result: God’s word “is able to save your souls.” Five times in this letter James uses the Greek word that is translated into English as “save.” Each time he uses the word for “save,” he is not talking about salvation from the penalty for sin and receiving eternal life. His readers were already saved in this sense.

James was writing to Jewish believers in Christ. Believers who know and apply God’s word can expect both a near result and a far result when faced with temptations and trials. The near result would be that the believers would be able to endure the temptation when they correctly apply the implanted word to the situation (James 1:12).

The far result would come when the believers are approved after applying the implanted word to the trial. They can expect to receive “the crown or life” at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

James’ readers knew what happened to disobedient people in the Old Testament. When King Saul disobeyed God, Samuel came along and told him that God would remove him as king of Israel (1 Sam. 15:10-23). Saul’s remaining life was a mess and he eventually died the sin unto death. The alternative to knowing and obeying God’s word is that believers will come under divine discipline and the possibility of the sin unto death.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” Lord, thank you for providing me with excellent Bible teachers and pastors. Let me be faithful in applying what they have taught and obeying what your word says. Let me not become angry with my problems and complain and grumble about them. Let me trust you to bring me through the difficulties and challenges of life.

James 1:25-27. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

This passage begins with the “perfect law of liberty.” In the New Testament the Greek word translated “perfect” carries the idea of “mature” or “complete.” In James 2:8 James again mentions the “law of liberty,” but also calls it the “royal law.” The words of Jesus in John 8:31-32 help us understand why James calls this the “perfect law of liberty.” “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” The “liberty” comes from our abiding in God’s word. While this letter of James may have been one of the first books of the New Testament to be written, the teachings of Jesus Christ and of the apostles, which would subsequently complete the New Testament, were being taught to the early church.

Based on what Jesus taught in John 8 to the Jews who believed in Him, the freedom comes when we know God’s word and do it. Paul also wrote of freedom in Rom. 6:6-7. “Knowing that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” We are not under the Old Testament law, but under grace. With the ministry of the Holy Spirit we can be doers of the word and be free from the slavery to sin.

The contrast James is bringing out in these verses is with true religion. A true relationship with God, is not a rigid following of rituals and participation in church practices. It is living out what Jesus taught. Abiding in God’s word. Learning it and applying it. Not being “a forgetful hearer, but a doer.” Gal. 5:14 says, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

James then gives three examples of how we can be doers of the word.

- 1) A person who “thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless.” James elaborates on verbal sins in James 3:1-12. As with any sin, our fellowship relationship with God is broken when we fail to control our speech.
- 2) “to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.” Orphans and widows in the ancient world had no way of supporting themselves. John wrote in 1 John 3:17, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him.” When we see a fellow believer in need and we have the ability to help them, but refuse to do so, our fellowship relationship with God is broken.
- 3) “to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” In my earlier years I heard that to be worldly was to live an overtly sinful lifestyle. In the Baptist church where I grew up, it was “don’t drink, dance, smoke, chew or go out with girls that do.” Then when I went to college in the northeast they added, “don’t go to movies.” Without delving into the *whys* and *wherefores* of these activities, the concern is with the lusts of the flesh resulting in overt sins. James is telling us to be unspotted with the way the world thinks. As Paul wrote in Rom. 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” I must keep renewing my mind with what God’s word says, and not be deceived by the false ideas of the world. I need to train my mind to think the way God wants me to think. I can do that through His word.



James 2:8-11. If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

In these verses James defines what he calls the "royal law." He refers to the command given in Lev. 19:18, as part of the Law given to Israel during the Exodus. Jesus also repeated this command in Matt. 22:39. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is a "royal law" because it is the overriding law governing all human relationships. It was also given by Jesus as the future King of God's coming Kingdom.

This is a "royal law" from a third perspective which David expressed in his last words found in 2 Sam. 23:3, "He who rules over men *must be* just, Ruling in the fear of God." A just ruler over a people or nation will do so in obedience to this royal law. The law undergirds all of our person to person relationships. So Paul wrote in Phil. 2:4 that I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, should look out not only for my "own interests, but also for the interests of others."

In James 2:1-7, James tells his readers not to show partiality to the rich members of their assembly and not to treat the poor members less honorably. James points out that favoritism, partiality, violates the royal law. A person showing partiality would not be showing love to his neighbor. "If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors."

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all." The law about which James writes here is the Old Testament law given to Israel. This includes resting on the Sabbath, paying three tithes, circumcision, animal sacrifices, as well as the moral commandments. God gave these commandments to Israel. But the New Testament repeats many of the moral commandments, as well as, adding others, just as Jesus taught, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

I was home from college one summer and had been attending a Bible study at a Bible church. The teacher taught that we are not required to pay tithes like Israel had to pay in Old Testament times. I commented about this to my father expecting him to disagree since our Baptist church always encouraged us to give "tithes and offerings." I was surprised that my father agreed with the Bible study teacher. I went back to my room and checked all the references to tithing I could find in the New Testament. All the New Testament references were descriptive of what the Jews were doing, but none were prescriptive to us as believers in Jesus Christ. We are not commanded to tithe. We are not required to pay tithes, but to give as each one purposes in his heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

Then James uses two of the Ten Commandments as an illustration of being required to keep the entire Old Testament law, and not cherry picking the ones a person wants to keep. Murder and adultery were both punishable by death in the Old Testament. Today we live under grace. We are not under the Old Testament law, but we are still expected to obey what God has told us in His word. These commandments given in the New Testament are aptly described as the "perfect law of liberty." Today, with all sixty-six books of the Bible we have God's "complete law of liberty."

James wrote to believers in Jesus Christ. He is telling me how I should live my life as a believer. If I obey God's word there is the potential for reward, such as the "crown of life" (James 1:12). But if I disobey, James goes on in the next verses to talk about judgment.

James 2:12-14. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” The Old Testament law which Israel was under was a law of bondage (Gal. 5:3). God had said to Israel, “Keep the Law, and I will bless you. Disobey and I will punish you.” This is the message of Lev. 26. The “perfect (complete) law of liberty” of James 1:25 replaces the Old Testament law.

God expects us to walk in obedience to His entire revealed word. He has given us the ministry of the Holy Spirit so that we can do so. This is a provision of God’s grace that can enable us to fulfill the “perfect law of liberty.” How well we do will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We will be “judged by the law of liberty.” The mercy we show to others in our walk with the Lord will be revealed victoriously at this judgment. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Most Bibles show a break between verse 13 and 14, often with a descriptive heading between the two verses. These breaks and headings reflect the interpretation of the passage as understood by the editors. The original text as written by James did not show paragraph breaks or subject labels. James 2:14 needs to be understood in its context. Verse 14 is not starting a new subject, but is continuing the subject that James discussed in the previous verses, i.e. judgment. The *New King James Bible* correctly translates the last clause in this verse, “Can faith save him?” Too many translators insert a word or words before the word “faith” reflecting the translators’ misunderstanding of the verse. The Bibles that add “that,” “this kind of,” or “such” have added words that are not in the original Greek text.

So when James asks the rhetorical question with the expected “No” answer, “Can faith save you?” We should look at the context to see from what faith without works cannot save us. That is why my memory card for James 2:14 includes the two prior verses. The subject of the two prior verses is judgment. James wrote that we “will be judged by the law of liberty.” This is future, meaning it is prophecy. The Bible speaks of multiple future judgments. Not just one great event where God checks to see if a person’s name is written in the Book of Life, and if not, God judges each person by his works. Jesus said that any person who “hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment” (John 5:24). But Paul (as does James) spoke of a different judgment, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” (2 Cor. 5:10).

So in James 2:12-13, James is looking at the Judgment Seat of Christ where a life of faith and works saves a believer’s reward from being burned with the “wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). “What does it profit ...” This profit is the reward, over and beyond eternal life, that we may potentially receive. A life of faith without works does not save a believer from the loss of these rewards.

James says that I live under the law of liberty. This is not a rigid set of rules like the Mosaic Law. I must learn the principles of right living and right decisions from God’s word. Then I must live them out in my life. James also called it the “royal law,” defining it as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” My position in God’s eternal Kingdom will be determined by how well I do that. I have liberty to learn and obey God’s word or not to do so. My eternal life is not at risk if I fail in this. That is the sense by which James calls it the “law of liberty.”



**Red-tailed Hawk, near East Bernard, Texas**

James 2:17-20. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

The way preachers and Bible teachers understand these verses runs the gamut of confusion. But what James is telling me is simple. I have believed in Jesus Christ and am already saved in the sense that God has forgiven my sins and given me eternal life. The same is true of the Jewish believers to whom James was writing. Now that I am already saved, God expects me to live as He wants me to live. Whether I do so or not is my own decision. Those decisions have consequences, both in this life and in the future when I appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ where my life will be evaluated.

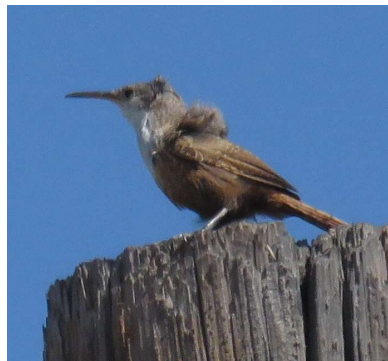
“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” Just looking at this verse by itself, we can come up with many ideas as to what James is saying. The previous two verses can help clarify its meaning. Context is always important. James 2:15-16 says, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it profit?*” This takes us back to the “royal law” in James 2:8, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” James is illustrating his point with an example of a believer who is disobedient to the law of liberty.” The word “dead” describes his faith as being sterile. This believer can expect no profit or reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” James repeats a principle taught by Jesus to His disciples in John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Demonstrating love for another believer with needs is a work that is visible evidence of our walk by faith as a believer in Jesus Christ.

Now James gives us a kind of “off the wall” example. “Even the demons believe—and tremble.” The demons” believe that there is one God,” and they respond in works by trembling. In eternity past, before God even created this world, the demons chose to rebel against God. They chose to follow Satan, not to trust in God. They chose to be disobedient to God. God has delayed the execution of their judgment. Jesus did not die for the angels. The fallen angels (demons) are not offered salvation.

I know very well how often I fail to obey God. I know that I sin all too often. God has promised that He saved me when I placed my trust in Jesus Christ. I do not need to look at any good works that I may do in my life to see if God has saved me. God has promised that He saved me when I believed. I believe God. I know I am saved because I believe God (1 John 5:11-13).

Now I need to decide that I want to learn from God’s word how He wants me to live. Then I need to live that way. If I fail to do so then my spiritual life is operationally dead. It is sterile, worthless, useless to others. I can expect discipline from God in this life for my disobedience and also for failure to learn His word which is also disobedience. I will also miss out on the potential of future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



Canyon Wren, Judge Roy Bean Museum, Langtry, Texas

James 2:21-24. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

James moves ahead in his discussion of faith and works using Abraham as an example. James refers to a major test or trial in Abraham’s life. He also quotes Gen. 15:6 about Abraham. James began this letter speaking of trials. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ... that you may be perfect and complete.” How I handle tests and trials in my life will determine if I will progress to spiritual maturity. Abraham handled the trial well “when he offered Isaac his son on the altar.” Genesis still tells us of other trials that Abraham failed. For example, he lied twice, calling his wife, Sarah, his sister.

The quotation: “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” When Abraham believed God, God declared him righteous. He was still a sinner, but as far as God was concerned he had perfect righteousness.

The same thing happened to me when I believed in Jesus Christ in September, 1947. God declared me righteous and as the preachers say, “God imputed to my account the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.”

But did this happen to Abraham in Gen. 15:6 where this verse appears? Or had it happened previously, perhaps in Gen. 12:1 when God told Abraham to get out of town to a land that God would show him. Gen. 15 uses the past tense when it says “Abraham believed God.” In fact, Abraham had just expressed doubt in God’s promise of a son of his own. In Gen. 15:1-2 Abraham did not think that he would ever have a son of his own.

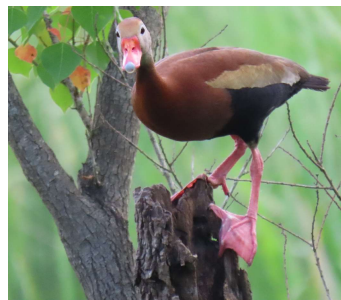
“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” Works in the Christian life are on-going. Believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins is done once. We are then justified by the imputation of Jesus’ perfect righteousness.

Dr. Constable’s *Notes* says, “Abraham’s faith was perfected by works in the sense that his works made his faith stronger. This is how James began this letter in James 1:2-4. ‘Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let ...’”

Abraham had faced many trials in his life, with some failures and successes, before this big one came along. The application of God’s word to the trials we face produces spiritual growth: “by works faith was made perfect.”

“You see that a man is justified by works.” Obeying God when we are faced with trials results in a justification by works. We see how God delivers us through the trials. Other people may also observe this outworking of our faith. Also, as we grow spiritually, our fellowship relationship with God is strengthened. James expresses this by quoting 2 Chron. 20:7 and Isa. 41:8 when he wrote, “he was called the friend of God.”

The issue James keeps bringing up in this letter is how I should live my life. He is not telling me what I need to do to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He was writing to his Jewish friends who were already believers in Jesus Christ. As James wrote in chapter 1, I need to “receive with meekness the implanted word” and I need to be a doer of that word.



**Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

James 2:25-26. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James moves from the “founding father” of Israel, Abraham, to a relative “nobody” in the world of the time, Rahab, to demonstrate his point of the importance of believers continuing to work out their faith in daily life.

Rahab’s story is told in Joshua 2. The Israelites were to be a witness to the world that their God, Yahweh, was the only true God. Rahab’s testimony in Joshua 2 shows us what had happened. Rahab was a believer in Yahweh having heard of the exodus from Egypt and how God had protected and preserved Israel during forty years in the wilderness (Josh. 2:9-11).

Rahab put her faith in God on the line. She risked her life to protect the two messengers Joshua had sent out. What would I have done? Would I have hidden the messengers in the stalks of flax on the roof (Josh. 2:6), or would I have turned them over to the king’s guards? The latter way was the easy way.

I can remember an argument in Sunday School years ago. Rahab lied. She sinned. The teacher, our associate pastor, defended her actions. A prominent church member argued that Rahab should not have lied. I had the Biblical principle explained to me later by another pastor who attached a label to the concept, “graded absolutism.” Sometimes we are faced with a choice of two decisions, both of which are wrong. For Rahab it was, Do I lie about the messengers being here or do I betray God’s people? She chose to follow the lesser of the two evils. She lied about the messengers and God blessed her actions. Rahab and her family were the sole survivors among the citizens of Jericho.

David and his men ate the showbread in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 21:1-6, Mark 2:25-26). God told Ezra that the Israelites who had returned to Israel should divorce their Canaanite wives. In the same era, Malachi was teaching that God hated divorce. Graded absolutism is a solid Biblical principal that is rarely taught, and even less often understood.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” As Dr. Constable’s *Notes* says “James uses the word “dead” as a synonym for “useless.” He does not use it for an analogy to being lost as an unbeliever who will be condemned to the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment.

So while my obedience to God has nothing to do with my eternal salvation from the penalty of sin and God giving to me eternal life, it has everything to do with my walk with the Lord. Do I justify my faith before other people in obedience to what God teaches in His word? If Rahab had not lied, she would have died the sin unto death as a believer in Yahweh, the God of Israel. God miraculously preserved Rahab and her family when everyone else in Jericho died (Heb. 11:31). James would have had to choose another example to demonstrate the importance of believers demonstrating their faith by a life of works, obeying God.



**Nelson’s Sparrow, Galveston Island State Park, Texas**

James 3:1-2. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

James begins a warning to his readers about becoming teachers. The early meetings of believers in Jesus Christ were not the structured worship services we have in our churches today. These meetings followed the traditions of the Jewish synagogues of the time. The attendees had freedom to speak and express their thoughts.

Notice the pronouns in these two verses: “Let not many of you become teachers.” Then James switches to the pronoun “we.” “We (teachers) shall receive a stricter judgment.” Also “We all stumble in many things ...” James recognized that even he was subject to error in what he might teach.

God will hold teachers responsible for what they teach about His word, “a stricter judgment.” 1 Pet. 5:1-4 gives specific instructions to church elders (Pastors who teach God’s word). They are to shepherd the flock of God willingly, not by compulsion. They are not to serve for the purpose of dishonest gain, but eagerly.

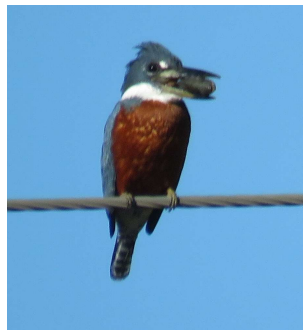
The third exhortation is that they are to be examples to the flock. I take this to be in the way they live, practicing what they preach from God’s word. Then “when the Chief Shepherd (Jesus Christ) appears, you will receive the crown of glory ...” Peter wrote his letter perhaps twenty years after James wrote and the meetings of believers may have been more structured.

This is not the first time James has brought up the subject of judgment. In James 2:12 he wrote, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” In fact, James has bracketed the “faith and works discussion of James 2 with warnings about a future judgment. I understand this to be the Judgment Seat of Christ, where we, as believers, will have our lives evaluated as to how well we have walked in obedience to God’s word.

Faithful elders also will receive the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4). Believers who love Jesus’ appearing (correct understanding of the prophecy of Jesus’ return) will receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). Believers who endure trials and temptations will receive the crown of life (James 1:12). Jesus promised His disciples that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in His Kingdom (Luke 22:13). Paul wrote in Phil. 2:15-16 about the believers he had taught, that if they became “blameless and harmless, children of God without fault ..., holding fast the word of life, so that I (Paul) may rejoice in the day of Christ that I (Paul) have not run in vain or labored in vain.” These all refer to rewards that believers who have walked faithfully, obeying God’s word, may receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Although the Bible has many references to these potential rewards, the possibilities far exceed these references. We have no idea what God has in store for each of us.

James’ letter is all about how I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, should live my life. I am to “receive with meekness the implanted word.” I am to be a doer of the word, and not a hearer only. I am to bridle my tongue. I am not to show partiality to certain believers over others. I am to love my neighbor as myself.

I believed in Jesus Christ, and God gave me eternal life. Now I should live out my faith in God and His word, through the works I do day by day. I need to know what God’s word says so that I can correctly tell unbelievers how they too can receive God’s gift of the forgiveness of their sins.



Ringed Kingfisher, Laredo, Texas

James 3:3-12. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

James has just written in James 3:1, “Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” He now moves on to what was at the time the principal means by which teachers functioned. That is through speaking – by using their voice or tongue.

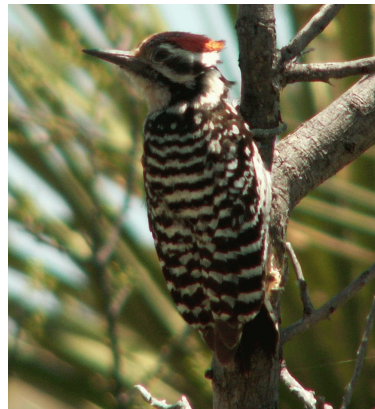
We do not have to go back far into history to see how a skilled public speaker can mislead people. Hitler was a powerful public speaker. He spoke eloquently and was elected by the people of Germany. He took the ideas of Darwin and convinced the German people that they were a superior race who should rule the world and along the way make the world a better place for all of mankind. But he also taught that the inferior races should be destroyed. This led to his plan to eliminate all the Jews in the world. Today we call that plan the Holocaust.

In 2021 we were told that the inflation that was obvious to everyone was just “transitory.” But I saw inflation coming, two years earlier, when the prices people were paying at the courthouse for foreclosed properties tripled. In 2015 our investment group bought 34 foreclosed properties. The number of properties we bought dropped 20% in 2016. Then in 2017 we bought only 14. In 2019, the year before COVID we bought 4. The economy was already beginning to experience inflation. Inflation that was driven not only by the Federal Reserve’s low interest rate policy but even more by the government’s tax and spend policies. So our government leaders first try to tell us that the inflation is “transitory.” When that lie fails to fly, they find other scapegoats.

The same thing happens in our churches, our schools, on television. College professors routinely disparage Biblical principles. Pastors twist God’s word to cater to public opinion and to build up the number of people listening to them. Peter called their motives “for dishonest gain” (1 Pet. 5:2).

The Bible tells me to learn what God is telling me in His word. I need to learn to be discerning. I need to know God’s word, so when I hear it taught falsely, I can discern between what is true and what is error.

I also need to be careful with what I say. Words can hurt people. Too often some inappropriate word comes out of my mouth and people are hurt. What we say can have an impact and on-going consequences.



**Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Christmas Mountain Oasis, Texas**

James 3:13-15. Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.

Do my actions speak louder than my words? Is James moving on to a new subject or is he still talking about the teachers in James 3:1 who will “receive a stricter judgment”? Those who teach us should exhibit wisdom and understanding in what they teach. Also the conduct of their lives should reflect the wisdom they are teaching. The author of Hebrews said much the same thing in Heb. 13:7, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

Wisdom is the ability to apply what we have learned in the past. We can study and learn a lot of things. But if we don’t use it, we forget what we have learned. We can know many Bible stories and principles for how to live. But wisdom is the ability to apply these stories and principles in our lives.

The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* translates James 3:13 in a straightforward way without the three unnecessary italicized words in the translation I cited above. “He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom’s gentleness.” James commands us to practice what we preach.

What are the underlying motives behind those who teach us? Are they trying to show how much they know and that what they have to say is better than what the next person may be teaching, i.e. “bitter envy.” Perhaps they are using their eloquent oratory to build up their own ministry and “line their own pockets”, i.e. “self-seeking” or as other translations say, “selfish ambition.” Is their concern that if they delve too deeply into what the Bible says that they will lose their congregation? So they focus on safe subjects spoken well.

“Do not boast and lie against the truth.” The way James worded this “if” clause in the Greek suggests that some of the people to whom he was writing were motivated in their teaching by envy and selfish ambition. Then he commanded them not to “lie against the truth.” A Bible teacher must be careful to correctly teach what the Bible says. To do otherwise is to lie against the truth. Much of the Bible was written for the purpose of correcting the false ideas that people were being taught.

James 3:15 has the warning that man’s wisdom, as opposed to God’s wisdom is earthly, i.e. from the world. It is “sensual.” The Greek word can be translated as fleshly, from our sin nature. “Demonic,” the ideas of Satan. The three sources of temptations that we face in our lives.

Let me show my works by my good conduct in the humility of wisdom.



Little Blue Heron, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas



James 3:16-18. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

When I wrote my book on James several years ago, I missed that these final verses in James 3 were still addressing the ministry of teachers. Teachers are to build up those whom they teach with the correct teaching of God’s word. As their congregations learn the word and apply it, the members will grow spiritually. Then when their pastors appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ, their stricter judgment may result in receiving the crown of glory mentioned in 1 Pet. 5:4.

“For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.” James presents a contrast in James 3:18 with this confusion and every evil thing when he writes “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” “Envy and self-seeking” or as other translations read, “jealousy and selfish ambition” produce confusion and disorder in a church. In contrast the fruit produced by believers who are taught the word and live it out results in peace.

The teaching of God’s word, called here “the wisdom that is from above,” is pure. It must conform to what the Scripture says.

“Peaceable, gentle, willing to yield..” It does not stir up trouble in the church or with others outside of the church. One commentary pointed out a bit of Greek trivia. All three of these words in the Greek begin with the letter “epsilon.” So James was into alliteration.

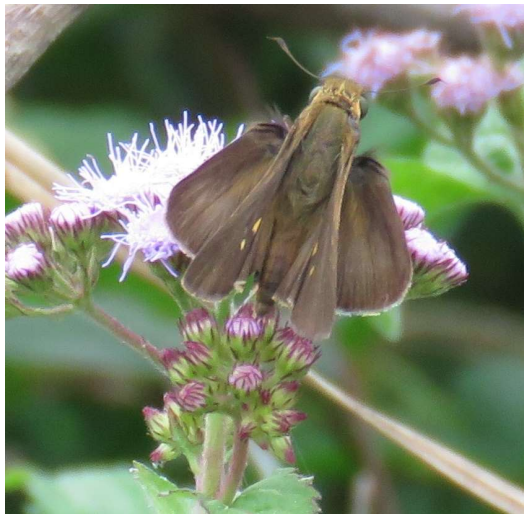
“Full of mercy” picks up ideas from earlier in this letter. Such as, visiting “orphans and widows in their need” (James 1:27). “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13).

“Good fruits.” “Doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:21)

“Without partiality.” James 2:9 wrote “if you show partiality, you commit sin.” But that is from our English translations. But James uses a different Greek word for “partiality” in James 3:17 from the word he used in James 2. The word in chapter 3 is used in the Bible only this one time. It is variously translated as “impartial,” “unwavering,” “uncontentious,” “without favoritism,” and “unquestioning.” The idea of impartiality follows up on what James wrote in the earlier verses of chapter 2.

“Without hypocrisy.” Everyone has heard of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. I don’t want to present myself to others as someone whom I am not. I want to walk with the Lord in obedience to His word, and that is what I want others to see in me.

Even if James were still addressing the potential wannabe teachers, these words can apply to all of us in our lives. I need to hear God’s word and then to apply it. I need to be a doer of the word and not a hearer only.



Ocola Skipper, butterfly, Kleb Woods Nature Preserve, Texas

James 4:1-4. Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

When I come to this fourth chapter in James, my reaction is that he is not talking about me. James is covering a spectrum of sins and certainly must be talking about unbelievers. But even as believers we are guilty of sin and there is no sin that a believer in Jesus Christ cannot commit.

“Where do wars and fights come from among you?” Have I ever had a fight or disagreement with another person? I want things done my way! I want to do my own thing!

“You lust.” James 1:14 says that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires ...” The same word in Chapter 1, “desires” is translated here in Chapter 4 as “you lust.” This is coveting something that I do not have. Coveting is desiring what belongs to another person.

“You murder and covet and cannot obtain.” 1 John 3:15 says, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.” James appears to be addressing the underlying motives behind his readers thinking, as much as overt actions. He is describing the way my sinful nature works. I need to fill my thinking with God’s word and what God wants me to do. Then my life will be controlled by the Holy Spirit through God’s word.

“You do not have because you do not ask.” Are my prayers dominated by what I want? I want to have fun. I want to lead a comfortable life. I want all the latest technological gizmos. I want other people to know how great I am. Or do I know God’s word so well that I know the things that bring glory to God? Maybe I should be praying for things that bring glory to God and not the things that appeal to me?

Then James addresses a second source of sin that we as believers face, the world. Do I think like the world or does my thinking come from what I have learned from God’s word? The world worships life and teaches that death is to be avoided at all costs. Paul said, “for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). The world says that the people you mistreated in the past are now entitled to compensation. God says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Heb. 10:30). The world says, “I can be whatever I want to be. As I think, so I am.” God says, “Be content with such things as you have” (Heb. 13:5). The world says that we are all good. “Let’s do \_\_\_ to make this a better world.” God says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

“Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” I need to remember when I hear people speak about how they think things should be that Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 2:3 that “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” Everything I need to know about how I should live my life, God has given me in His word.



**Ring-necked Duck, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

James 4:5-8 . Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your hands, you sinners*; and purify *your hearts, you double-minded*.

Not only is the fifth verse here difficult to translate, but it sounds like James is quoting a Scripture that no one can find. The conclusion is that James is referencing a principle found throughout the Old Testament. Is the spirit the Holy Spirit or the human spirit? Flip a coin, and pick your commentary. Heads and one commentary will say it one way or tails and the other commentary will say it differently. It seems like this verse is condemning the spiritual adultery mentioned in James 4:3 where his readers were more interested in the things of the world than they were of God. Our God is a jealous God (Old Testament terminology) and does not tolerate the worship of anyone else or any other thing. Dr. Will Johnston, a Dallas Seminary professor, translated it as "human spirit."

"He gives more grace." "No matter how far I stray from God, God never runs out of grace."

"God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." This verse which is also repeated in 1 Pet. 5:5 appears to reference two Old Testament verses. Psa. 138:6 says, "Though the LORD *is* on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar." Prov. 3:34 gives us the second clause of the quotation, "Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble." Maybe God is trying to get this point across to me. When I stray, I need to return to God in humility. His grace is always there for me.

Then in rapid fire order James gives us ten commands in the next four verses: Five in James 4:7-8, and five in James 4:9-10.

"Submit to God." I need to obey God. To do that I need to know what He wants me to do. That is why I need to learn Scripture.

"Resist the devil." James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation." Speaking of the devil, Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 5:9. "Resist him; steadfast in the faith." Jesus answered Satan's temptations by quoting Old Testament verses. We resist the devil when we know God's word, believe and apply it.

"Draw near to God." I need to pray more often. I need to meditate on God's word.

"Cleanse your hands." James is not talking about washing up for dinner. 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We draw near to God by confessing our sin and then turning from those sins. Confession of sin restores our fellowship relationship with God. Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"

"Purify your hearts." Now we have a cultural problem. "Heart" today is used in a different sense than it was 2,000 years ago. In James' day, the heart was the center of a person, the thinking center. I need to wash out of my mind all the world's false ideas and fill my mind with the truth of God's word.



**Green Anole, a lizard disguised among green leaves, Houston, Texas**

James 4:8-12. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

This is the second group of five rapid-fire commands that James gave his readers. These look like they follow on the prior five commands, i.e. to “submit to God; Resist the devil”; “Draw near to God; Cleanse your hands; and purify your hearts.” When it becomes necessary for believers to apply these first five commands in their lives because they have strayed from the truth in disobeying God, then these final five commands are appropriate. Laughter and joy are not forbidden of believers in Jesus Christ. But if I am not walking with the Lord, then it is time to “lament and mourn and weep.” I need to confess my sins and turn from them. I need to move forward in my Christian life, and not to slip backwards.

Then the tenth of these rapid-fire commands: “Humble yourselves.” James closes out a unit of thought James began in James 4:6, “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” When I disobey God, I am acting in pride and arrogance. I am in essence thinking that what I want is more important than what God has told me to think, to say, and to do in His word. Hence, James began these ten commands with “Submit to God.”

I have heard preachers categorize sins into three types: deeds, words, and thoughts. Many of the Ten Commandments forbid sins of doing (or not doing). Disobedience of these Ten Commandments are actions or deeds. A lot of people think they are OK, if they don’t do the things prohibited in the Ten Commandments.

The tenth commandment however, is a sin of thinking. Do not covet. So it is ignored by most people, including a lot of believers. Coveting often results in disobedience to some of the first nine commandments. Believers sometime divorce because they desire or covet another person other than their current spouse. Believers, like unbelievers, will spend money unwisely because they covet a nicer car, or a bigger house in a better neighborhood, or they want the latest electronic gizmo or the latest clothing styles.

Disobedience to the first commandment can be a sin of thinking. I have heard believers speak like the world speaks and dishonor God by making reference to such things as “mother earth,” or “mother nature.” Did God create this world six to eight thousand years ago as He said He did, or did this world pop into existence through a “big bang” event billions of years ago and then somehow life happened and everything living somehow evolved to its present state of being. If a Christian twists Genesis 1-11 to include the ideas of the world, then what god are they worshipping?

Bearing false witness and taking the Lord’s name in vain are speaking sins. So James adds a command in James 4:11, “Do not speak evil of one another.” This doesn’t prohibit employers from evaluating their employees. It doesn’t prohibit judges and jurors from deciding the guilt or innocence of defendants in a court of law. It doesn’t prohibit church leaders from working with believers who bring dishonor and disgrace to Jesus Christ through their sinful actions that have been evidenced by the testimony of two or three eye witnesses. This does not prohibit a parent from disciplining a child. The “one another” of this passage tells us that James is addressing a believer who speaks inappropriately about a fellow believer (or even an unbeliever) who is not his responsibility.

James 4:13-17. Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

James is a practical book of the Bible. Today's verses are a good example. It isn't wrong to make plans for what I will do in the future. But there seems to be two issues with which James is concerned in these verses. First: Why are these people telling others the details of their business plans? Like many people, these people are merchants. James had written in James 4:10 about the importance of humility. But these merchants are bragging about this business enterprise they are planning. Too often I am guilty of bragging about my successes. My failures I try to hide from others.

Second: James writes, "If the Lord wills ..." God's will is a subject not well understood by many Christians. We often pray that God would show us if some intended plan is His will. Should these Jewish merchants have prayed such a prayer before deciding to go to such and such a city, ...? James does not say anything about prayer in this context. He did address prayer in James 1:5-6, where he wrote that if anyone lacked wisdom about how to handle the trials they were facing that they should ask God for wisdom. A merchant knows how to obtain the products he is going to sell and should know who is likely to buy those goods. But all of this requires certain skills. Wisdom is what we need to be able to obtain the products to be sold and where to go to sell them. But James does not seem to be discussing a prayer for wisdom in these verses.

God's word tells me what His will is for my life. As 2 Pet. 1:3 says, "His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." It is up to me whether I will obey what God has commanded me to think, to say and to do in my life.

But the Bible also talks about another aspect of God's will and that is what James addresses here. God decreed in eternity past everything that would happen in this creation. This is not the eastern fatalism that Augustine imported into Christianity from Manichaeism when he converted to the Roman church. This fatalism has misled many Christians on the Biblical subject of predestination. We know God is sovereign and what He says goes and will happen. But God also created man in His image. Part of that image is that God gave man the ability to determine his own destiny. God also is omnipotent and even with each person having the ability to determine his own eternal destiny by choosing to believe in God or not, God also in His omnipotence is able to accomplish what He has decreed.

God has commanded us to believe. But our believing does not save us. God promised that when I believed that He would save me. So my faith did not save me. I was not saved by my faith. That would be works. I was saved through faith since when I believed, God saved me.

These merchants were boastful in their business plans. The success of their business venture did not rest on them, but on whatever the situations and circumstances that may develop over the year when they were planning to buy and sell in a new city. God's will which He had decreed in eternity past would ultimately determine the success or failure of their planned business enterprise.

Should these merchants have prayed about their new business venture? "Prayer changes things" as the slogan goes. From eternity past, God heard our prayers. God provided the answers to my prayers in eternity past when He decreed everything that would happen in this world He created.

James 5:7-9. Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

In chapter 5 James again reviews the future events God promised us. “The coming of the Lord is at hand.” James wrote this 2000 years ago. Still Jesus has not returned. At the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus and His disciples, they preached, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom did not come then and it hasn’t come in the 2,000 years since James wrote this prophecy. When Jesus began His ministry, the offer was legitimate. But the Jews did not change their mind and believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. As a result, the arrival of the kingdom was postponed.

In the middle of each of the four gospels, after Jesus had given the Jewish people opportunity to believe in Him as their Messiah, Jesus’ ministry did a major change. He began teaching in parables and also started teaching His disciples about a previously unknown entity which He called the Church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus also taught His disciples about His impending death and resurrection. Further, that Jesus would leave them and then return again at a future time.

When James wrote that “The coming of the Lord was at hand,” he was talking about this future return of Jesus Christ for His Church. It was “at hand” because it could occur at any time. The next unfulfilled prophecy for which we are to look is this return of Jesus Christ for His Church. There is no other unfulfilled prophecy that must occur before Jesus can return. If there is any other prophecy that must be fulfilled before Christ returns for His Church, then His return cannot be said to be “at hand.”

This is what distinguishes the Rapture of the Church from the Second Coming of Christ. Rev. 19:11-21 describes the Second Coming, which follows the events of Rev. 4-18. The Second Coming also follows the arrival of the Antichrist called the “man of sin” and “son of perdition” in 2 Thess. 2:2. Jesus called the Antichrist “the abomination of desolation” in Matt. 24:15. These are prophecies that need to be fulfilled before the Second Coming, but not before the Rapture.

“Early and latter rain.” James gives this agricultural illustration to emphasize the importance of patience. His readers were living in a society where agriculture was the principal industry. Jewish farmers planted their crops in the Fall when the early rains came. The crops (“the future fruit of the earth”) were ready to harvest in the Spring after the latter rains came.

“Establish your hearts.” God wants me to build up, “establish,” the thinking part of my life, called at the time, “hearts.” He wants me to learn as much as I can about how to live a godly life, and to do it by applying God’s word to every situation I face in life.

“Do not grumble against one another.” I am not to grumble or complain about other people. Why? Let Jesus be the Judge. After Jesus returns for His Church, I, and all other believers, will have our lives evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This evaluation is to determine if we will receive special rewards over and above the gift of eternal life that all believers in Jesus Christ have already received.

James is commanding me to (1) “Be patient;” (2) “See” and “Behold” (I am to know and understand what God has promised for my future); (3) “Establish,” build up my mind with His word; (4), “Do not grumble” about others. James has a lot to say about how I should live my life.

James 5:10-12. My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended* by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes,” be “Yes,” and *your* “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.

James uses the Old Testament prophets and Job as examples of patience during times of difficulties. In Job’s case everything was going very well. Then a series of calamities hit. All his children died. His flocks were stolen and crops lost. His house was destroyed in a hurricane or tornado. Job was struck with a painful skin disease. He was left only with his complaining wife who said, “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). Before I think too badly of her for saying this, I need to think about how I would react if a similar set of disasters hit my family in a few days. Then a few friends came along. For thirty-five and one-half chapters they explored with Job the false wisdom of the world as to why all these bad things happened to Job. Sorting out the truth from error in their discussions is tough. Finally, in Job 38, God speaks truth to Job, clarifying the disinformation in the discourses of his friends.

For me, the lesson is not to be carried away with the thinking of the world taught by teachers, professors, talking heads on TV, newspaper opinions or even the ideas of friends, but to know and learn the Truth from God’s word. Job did not have any part of the written Scripture at this time.

“Prophets.” I learned about Daniel and the lions’ den in Sunday School. The Old Testament prophets suffered greatly by bringing God’s messages to the people. James began this letter with the comment, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). Now in James 5 he reminds us that as believers in Jesus Christ, even when we walk faithfully with the Lord, we can expect to face difficulties, problems and trials of our faith. Satan is the ruler of this world, and because of this we can expect bad things to happen.

“The Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” God knows what is happening to me. Jesus faced the same problems I face and even more. He remained faithful in His life. God has made provision for me so that no matter what I face in life, I can persevere through it, if I walk by faith, obeying God and applying His word to every situation.

James also repeats the command given by Jesus in Matt. 5:34-37: “Do not swear.” The bad guy hypocrites in the gospels, the Pharisees, were known for swearing. They would try to impress others that what they were saying was the truth by using oaths to convince people that they were telling the truth. James’ and Jesus’ points were just speak the truth. If you do this then you don’t need to use an oath to convince other people that “this time” you are really telling the truth. Yes, it is OK in a court of law to take an oath that you will tell “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

“Lest you fall into judgment” (condemnation). How I live my life today has consequences. If I disobey God’s word, I can face discipline during my life, and the loss of potential reward for eternity when my life is evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



**Groove-billed Ani, Tejano-Formosa Wetlands, near Port Lavaca, Texas**

James 5:13-15. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

This is an interesting set of verses that has spawned an array of different interpretations. “Is anyone among you suffering?” James wrote in James 1:2, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he immediately makes himself an enemy of the world. In Paul’s final letter in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:12), he wrote, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

Suffering is a reality in this life. How should I handle suffering? Will I apply what I have learned from the word of God to the situation? To do this requires that I have studied and learned what the Bible teaches. Then I must exercise faith and apply God’s word to these trials and sufferings. James gives the first response we should all have to suffering: prayer.

Is anyone cheerful?” Let him sing psalms.” This is in contrast to suffering. Sometimes life seems to be working out well. The Psalms of the Old Testament may have been the hymnbook of the early church. But the word here can also refer to praise. Let me not forget to praise God when things are going well.

“Is anyone sick?” In James 5:14 the Greek word translated “sick” is different from the word translated “sick” in James 5:15. But most English translations translate both words as “sick.” “Is anyone sick?” This is the common word for physical illness. He has prayed as James tells him to do in James 5:13. He is still sick. It is time to seek intercessory prayers from other believers. Who would be better for doing that than the elders of the church? The term “elder” in the New Testament is used synonymously with the words for pastor or overseer (1 Pet. 5:1-2). This letter of James was one of the earliest of the New Testament books to be written. The elders in our churches today are a cultural by-product of the way our churches are structured. So I hesitate to equate the “elders” James is mentioning with present day church elders. It may be that these elders James is telling the sick believer to call are simply more spiritually mature believers.

So what are these spiritual leaders to do? First, intercessory prayer. Second, anoint with oil. There were not a lot of medicines back in James’ day. Anointing with oil was simply a cultural practice for treating sick people. This is not some new healing ritual that James was instituting.

Not explicitly stated by James, but perhaps there may be spiritual issues in this sick believer’s life with which he must deal. This is particularly true when we look at the context before and after these three verses. So the “prayer of faith will save the sick, ... and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” There is that word “save” which we often read incorrectly in modern day vernacular. James uses the word five times and never once in the sense of receiving forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In this case, “save” means physical healing.

But wait, I just pointed out that James uses two different words in verses 14 and 15 for “sick.” This is the same word used in Heb. 12:3 with the idea of being “weak.” The ministry of these elders is strengthening the faith of this weak (sick) believer. Whose faith is saving, i.e. healing, the sick? I take it that this is the faith of the sick believer who had called on the spiritual leaders of the church for intercessory prayer.

“If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” Maybe he has and maybe he hasn’t committed sins. But if he has, if he confesses those sins and turns from them, he is forgiven those sins and cleansed. His fellowship and Christian walk is restored.



James 5:16-18. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James is continuing the subject of prayer which he started in James 5:14 writing “Is anyone among you sick, let him call for the elders (spiritual leaders) of the church.” Now he adds: “Confess your trespasses to one another.” The implication here is that this believer’s sickness may be the result of divine discipline arising from his inter-personal relationship(s) with one or more other believers. Hence, the need to call for the spiritual leaders of the church.

Whenever I have a problem with another person, often there are wrongs on both sides. What is the best way to restore friendly relations between two people who are disagreeing with each other? I can tell my wife everything she has done wrong. Will that make things better? No! But if I admit the things I have done wrong, .... Bingo. Now we can begin to re-build our rapport with each other.

The same thing applies in our fellowship with God which can be interrupted by personal sin. 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Well, that leaves me out. I am a sinner. How can I qualify as a righteous man? I have believed in Jesus Christ and God has imputed the perfect righteousness of Jesus to my account. But I still sin. The first step to an effective prayer life is to confess my known sins to God and then to turn from them.

James then uses an Old Testament example for effective prayers that availed much. Elijah, being an Old Testament prophet living before the full canon of Scripture had been completed, spoke messages to the people of Israel that God had given him. But he also had the complete Law of Moses and he knew what it said. He knew from Lev. 26 that God had warned Israel of seven stages of discipline if they wandered from the truth and worshiped idols, rather than God.

So in 1 Kings 17:1, just from the then revealed word of God, Elijah could confidently tell Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” God may well have spoken directly to Elijah, but Elijah also knew what God’s will was with respect to idol worship. Therefore Elijah’s prayer was based on God’s will as revealed in the then known Scripture.

One of our New Testament prayer promises is that God will hear our prayers when we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). God has revealed His will to us in His word. I need to know God’s word so that I can know His will and can pray according to that will.

The translators of these verses bounce back and forth between using “earth” and “land.” I am sure that the lack of dew or rain for three and one-half years was only in the land of Israel and not over all the earth. Both “earth” and “land” are correct translations of the Greek into English. When I read a Bible verse that says “earth,” I need to double-check the context. Is this a reference to the whole earth, or is it to the land of Israel? Many times it is the latter.



**Sleepy Orange, butterfly, Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, Texas**

James 5:19-20. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

This is James’ concluding words to his readers. “If anyone among you ...” Any believer in Jesus Christ is capable of departing from the truth of God’s word. Departing from this truth is sin. The first step in not departing is to learn God’s word, then believe it and do it. As James wrote, “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

“Wanders from the truth.” God’s word is the truth. To “wander” conveys the idea of a gradual departure. I suspect most of us have done what I have done before and gone swimming in very cold water. I think of a time when I visited my grandparents in Duluth and went swimming in Lake Superior. Even in the summer that water is cold! The normal approach is to go one step at a time, letting your body adjust to the cold water. The illustration fails when finally the water is high enough on the body and you take a deep breath and submerge yourself. But as Heb. 2:1 warns us, “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” When we hear false teaching either from the world around us or from those who misinterpret the Bible, we move away from God’s truth a little at a time. We wander or drift away step by step until we find ourselves thinking like the world. God gives us His word, so we can know what His truth is.

In this letter James has touched on many areas of sin that believers may commit: Failure in the way I may handle the trials and temptations that come my way; failure to control my speech; failure to help orphans and widows (and anyone else) in need; showing partiality; grumbling and complaining; envy and self-seeking; becoming a friend of the world by buying into the false ideas of the world; failure to keep my word. All these things and more, James has touched on.

“... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way ...” James is leaving this ministry open to any believer, “and someone turns him back.” I have been blessed many times when fellow believers have corrected my sinful actions. This is when I need to heed James’ repetition of the Old Testament command, and humble myself (James 4:10). It is not the time to make excuses. It is not the time to justify myself. It is not the time to blame others.

“Save a soul from death.” James is writing to believers in Jesus Christ. So “death” here is not eternal condemnation in the Lake of Fire. It could be what some preachers call, operational death. This is a believer who is walking out of fellowship with God. He needs to confess his known sins. He may also have failed to learn God’s word so he can handle the stresses and hardships that come to each one of us. But it also includes the ultimate outcome of a believer who continues to disobey the truths of God’s word, the sin unto death. God is gracious and gives us every opportunity to turn from our sins and to obey Him. But at some point, God will “pull the plug” and take the sinning believer home to be with Him and stop the ongoing proliferation of sins.

“Cover a multitude of sins.” This is Old Testament terminology. Years after James wrote this, John wrote in the New Testament, “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.



**Created by a divine make-up artist, Exposed Bird Dropping Moth, Houston**

1 Pet. 1:1-2. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

This first letter of Peter is Jewish in its orientation. He addresses his readers as “pilgrims,” “aliens,” “strangers,” or “exiles” depending on your choice of translations. As Paul wrote in Phil. 3:20, “our citizenship is in heaven.” John wrote in 1 John 2:15, “Do not love the world or the things of the world.” Paul also wrote in Rom. 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, ...” Knowing the truth of God’s word is what sets us apart from the thinking and ideas of the world around us. Peter wrote this letter to be circulated among Jewish believers in five Roman provinces located in the northern part of what we know today as the nation of Turkey.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” Yes, in eternity past, God sovereignly decided to create the world. This act of creation includes not only all the material parts of the universe, but also everything that happens from the beginning of creation in Gen. 1:1 and on into eternity with the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). But God’s sovereign decree (which is what it is called theologically) was not done apart from all His other infinite divine attributes. One of these attributes is His omniscience. God’s foreknowledge is mentioned importantly in this passage. Foreknowledge is a part of God’s omniscience. In short, God knew what He was doing. God created man in His own image.

One aspect of that image of God in which man was created is that God gave man the ability to choose for God or against God. God also is omnipotent and in His omnipotence can bring His predetermined plan and purpose to fruition, even with man having the ability of self-determination.

Too many theologians do work-arounds in their thinking and re-define some of the words of Scripture. “Foreknowledge” is one of them. The Greek word is not difficult to understand. It means “to know beforehand.” But sometimes it is equated as a synonym with another Greek word meaning “foreordination.” So in the *New King James Version* in 1 Pet. 1:20 the translators translated the Greek word for “foreknowledge” as “foreordination.” Also in 2 Pet. 3:17, the Greek verb form of the noun “foreknowledge” is correctly translated “you know this beforehand.”

“Foreknowledge” is not a relationship term. I have heard some Bible teachers refer to the euphemistic use of the word “to know” in Gen. 4:1, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” They then say that God’s foreknowledge is talking about God’s relationship with each person before each person was even born. Actually, “foreknowledge” means what it says. Foreknowledge is a part of God’s omniscience. God knew what He was doing. He knew everything that would happen from the beginning to the end.

My God is a righteous and just God. He gave me the ability to believe in Him. When I believed in Him, He saved me as He promised he would. My unbelieving neighbor has the same ability to believe in God. But because he chooses not to believe, God does not save Him. I can legitimately tell that neighbor, as God has commanded me to do, that “Jesus died for you.”

“In sanctification of the Spirit,” God commands me to “be filled with (by means of) the Spirit” (Eph. 5:20). When I do so, I am set apart (the every day meaning of the word, “sanctification”) to walk by means of the Spirit in my life.

“For obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Sprinkling is a reference to the Old Testament system of sacrifices. We obey God’s commands as given to us in the Bible. But when I disobey, God has provided cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:9. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 Pet. 1:3-5. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter packs a lot into these introductory verses of this letter. He expects his readers to already know this stuff, so he does not give a lot of details.

I have been born again. Remember Nicodemus’ meeting with Jesus, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3). Adam and Eve died immediately, just as God said they would, when they ate the forbidden fruit. Yet Adam continued to live physically for another 900+ years. So how did Adam die immediately when he ate the fruit? His human spirit died. When I believed, my human spirit was born by the power of God. I understand being born again in a literal sense. Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:5), you must “be born of water (physical birth) and the Spirit” (birth of the human spirit).

“To a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” We celebrate Jesus’ resurrection one day a year. But Jesus’ resurrection was the very heart of the gospel message as shown here and throughout the New Testament. Wow! Jesus died and then came back to life again! Jesus’ resurrection turned the disciples from cowards in hiding to dynamic witnesses that went throughout the ancient world telling everyone they saw about Jesus’ rising from the dead. Because He rose from the dead, we can have this hope, total confidence that by believing in Jesus Christ, that we will live forever.

“To an inheritance.” We think of inheritance today as something that we receive after someone dies. Well, Jesus Christ died. God gave me eternal life as my own possession when I believed in Jesus Christ. To the Jewish way of thinking, their inheritance was the promised land which would be their possession forever. Now we know that that land will be in the new heaven and new earth of Rev. 21:1-2.

“Incorruptible,” “undefiled,” “does not fade away.” The English is clear enough. But for a bit of Greek trivia, Peter outdid himself here with alliteration. Not only does each word begin with the Greek letter for “A,” but each word ends with the same syllable, “ton.” Peter wanted his readers to get the point that their inheritance is a done deal.

“Who are kept by the power of God.” When I believed, God saved me. His omnipotent power is protecting my eternal salvation. There is no way that I can lose it. As Jesus said in John 10:27-29. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand.” Once I believed in Jesus Christ and God saved me, there is no way I can lose my salvation.

“Through faith.” I was not saved by my faith (that would be salvation by works). God saved me through my faith, i.e., I believed, and then God saved me. Which brings me back to God’s “abundant mercy” Peter mentions at the start of these three verses. In no way did I deserve this wonderful salvation God has given me. It was God’s gift, “through His abundant mercy.”

“For salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” At “the last time,” the Rapture of the Church, we will see first hand the wonders of the eternal life, we now possess. This will also be the time of the Judgment Seat of Christ where the life of each believer will be evaluated. For some this will mean the revealing of the rewards that God has reserved for believers who have faithfully obeyed God’s word.

1 Pet. 1:6-9. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

“In this you greatly rejoice.” What is the “this” in which we are to rejoice? I have been thinking that it was my eternal salvation. It may make sense in English, but it does not work in the Greek text. The pronoun that Peter uses for “this” is masculine whereas both “salvation” and “power” in the Greek of 1 Pet. 1:5 are feminine words. Thomas Constable’s *Notes* says “this” refers to the entire sentence encompassed in 1 Pet. 1:3-5, i.e. my new birth as a believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus’ resurrection, my inheritance that I possess that cannot be lost. Kenneth Wuest’s *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* says that “this” refer to the mention of the “last time” which also is in the masculine gender. Do I rejoice in my anticipation of the soon return of Jesus Christ in this “last time”?

“If need be.” Don’t skip over this “if” thinking that it does not refer to my situation now. Greek grammar has four different conditional clauses that can all be correctly translated beginning with the word “if.” But the implication of this “if” clause is yes, it is necessary that I will face various trials.

“Trials” is a broad word. It can include sickness, accidents, war, persecution, animosity from others, or broadly speaking, any negative experience. I heard a preacher recently dump all of this into one word “adversity.”

Satan is the ruler of this present world. Everyone living is a sinner. So we all face adversity as a normal course of events in our lives. The *New King James Version* and *English Standard Version* say we may be grieved by these adversities, but the *New American Standard Version* uses what is probably a better word, “distressed.” Peter is writing to tell us how to handle the distresses from all the adversities we constantly face in life.

“The genuineness of your faith.” Peter wrote 1 Pet. 1:1-5 describing believers in Jesus Christ. So it is not the nature or quality of my faith by believing in Jesus Christ that resulted in God saving me that is being tested and proved by how I handle adversities. The adversities of life test my walk by faith.

Faith and believing require an object in which we place that faith. When I was born again in September, 1947, the object of my faith was Jesus Christ. I believed the truth that I had been taught about Him and God saved me. I am bombarded daily with the gnats and mosquitoes of adversities in life and occasionally by a stampede of elephants. How do I react? Do I know a promise from God’s word that might fit the situation? Do I get angry and pop off with an expletive? Do I keep myself awake all night worrying or do I apply 1 Pet. 5:7, “Casting all your care upon Him”?

Peter tells me that when I apply God’s word by faith to these adversities, whether deer flies or hippos, they will “be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

When Jesus returns for His Church, my life will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and then those believers who have handled the adversities of life well by applying God’s word by faith, will receive – “the salvation of your souls.” I take it that this salvation Peter mentions in 1 Pet. 5:9 is lagniappe – something extra, over and above the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, which God gives to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. The lagniappe is the rewards faithful believers will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1 Pet. 1:10-12. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

The Old Testament prophets wrote and spoke the messages they had received from the Holy Spirit. They did not fully comprehend what those messages were saying. The immediate application for the people of Israel at the time was that they should turn from the worship of idols, and believe in God, keeping His commandments. The salvation about which the Old Testament prophets spoke was the deliverance of Israel into the promised kingdom to be ruled by their Messiah whom we now know as Jesus Christ. We, as Church Age believers, will participate in that kingdom during the Millennium and into eternity in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2).

How could Israel’s future Messiah suffer as Isa. 53 tells us and yet be a ruling king over the glorious kingdom promised to Israel? Were there to be two messiahs, which was an idea concocted by some Jewish rabbis? Isa. 53:6-7 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way, And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.” Compare this to Mic. 5:2. “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

Today we have Bible teachers, preachers, professors and others who, not understanding what the Bible says, allegorize the meaning of Scripture or add their own ideas as to what it means. Many times we are warned not to follow false teachers, such as, 1 John 4:1. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

“The Spirit of Christ.” This is the Holy Spirit. In John 16:7-11 Jesus told His disciples that after His ascension, He would send the Holy Spirit to them. This He did in Acts 2:1-4.

“Angels desire to look into.” The Bible does not tell us much about angels. They are spirit beings (Heb. 1:7). Heb. 2:6-7 also tells us that angels are superior to us mere humans, whatever that means. One-third of the angels (Rev. 12:4) rebelled against God choosing to follow Satan. God has prepared the Lake of Fire for Satan and his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41). In Job 38:4-7 we are told that “the sons of God (angels) shouted for joy” when God “laid the foundations of the earth.” I understand this to mean that angels were created by God before the time of Gen. 1:1. In 1 Pet. 1:12 Peter tells us that the angels watch with interest what we are doing in this world God has created.

While God has given me salvation from the penalty of my sins and eternal life, there is a potential future salvation that depends upon how I use the divine resources God has given to me to live a life pleasing to Him. These divine resources include the Holy Spirit and God’s completed canon of Scripture. I need to know God’s word so well that when I face any adversity of life, I will react in accordance to God’s word.

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

“Therefore.” Peter sums up what he has just written in the opening verses of this letter.

“Gird up the loins of your mind.” Our minds do not have loins and we can’t literally put a girdle on our minds. This is obviously figurative language. I am to reinforce my thinking with God’s word, not with the false ideas of the world. Peter followed this up with, “Be sober.” The meaning of this word in the English has changed over the years. As used here it means that I am to think clearly, using what I have learned from God’s word. I am to apply God’s word to every circumstance and adversity I face in life.

“Rest your hope.” When I see this world completely falling apart and wonder what else can go wrong, I know, or at least I should know, that the ultimate victory is coming: “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thess. 4:16-18.) I don’t need to stress myself out with the adversities of life. I can have confident assurance (a better way to understand the word “hope” in the Bible) that God is in control.

“As obedient children.” I am to obey what God has commanded in His word.

“Not conforming yourselves to the former lusts.” Paul used the same word “conform” in Rom. 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” I need to renew my thinking through knowing God’s word, so as to put away my sinful desires and lusts (“as in your ignorance” of God’s word).

In 1 Pet. 1:16-17 Peter talks about being holy. Medieval art pictured saints with a halo around their heads to show they were holy. The Biblical word “holy” means to be set apart. Thank you, but what does that mean? In extra-biblical literature of the time, temple prostitutes were also described as being holy. Being a prostitute is not what we would call holy living today. Those temple prostitutes were totally dedicated, i.e. set apart, to serving the temple idol or idols. For me to be holy, I need to be totally dedicated in my actions, as well as my thinking, to knowing God and obeying Him.

Peter quotes a verse from Lev. 11:45. He is writing to Jewish believers who knew the Old Testament well. “Be holy, for I am holy.” How is God holy? God is totally separate and distinct. He is not like the false gods and idols which the unbelievers of the world worship. He is separate from this world that He created. He did not somehow exist and everything else evolved from him. That is what our unbelieving friends would like us to think about the origin of life and the entire universe. Once upon a time, there was a “big bang,” and we all somehow happened.



**Western Kingbird, near Palestine, Texas**

1 Pet. 1:22-25. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

These four verses package together the Christian life. “Purified your souls,” but perhaps better in the *English Standard Version*, “having purified your souls.” Peter may be recalling Jesus’ response to him in the Upper Room in John 13:10 when Jesus said, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” When I believed in Jesus Christ, I was completely cleansed, washed, purified from all my sins, past, present, and future. But I find that I am still a sinner. As Jesus illustrated in His answer to Peter, when I sin, I need to wash my feet. 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“Having purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.” The eternal salvation of anybody requires two divine gifts: “The truth” of God’s word, and the work of the Holy Spirit to make that truth understandable. God created us in His image, We have the ability to believe or not to believe. Those who choose to believe, God then saves. How? “Having been born again.” I had nothing to do with my physical birth in August, 1938. Likewise, I had nothing to do with my new spiritual birth in September, 1947. God did all the work of saving me.

There are two textual variants in these four verses. Both of which are omitted in the Greek text from which most of our modern translations were translated. The two textual variants are found in the majority of Greek manuscripts. The prepositional clause, “through the Spirit” is omitted in the Critical Text from which most of our modern translations were made. I consider the work of the Holy Spirit as important in the salvation of every believer in Jesus Christ. The word “forever” found in “through the word of God which lives and abides forever” is also omitted. But it is found in the majority of Greek manuscripts. Although I prefer the *New King James Version* since it is closer to the Majority Text, I appreciate my Bible’s footnotes which point out these textual variants. We do not have a perfect Bible translation.

Peter then quotes a passage from Isa. 40:6-8. Our physical bodies and this world in which we live are transitory. “But the word of the Lord endures forever.” What God has promised, He will do.

Let me not forget the one command in these four verses: “Love one another fervently with a pure heart.” I have a “pure heart” when I have no unconfessed sins in my life. 1 John 1:9. Even then, having love for others is tough. But God commands me to do so.



Red-winged Blackbird, Matagorda County, Texas



1 Pet. 2:1-3. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

Peter ended chapter one (1 Pet. 1:25) with the statement, “the word of the Lord endures forever.” Previous to that he commanded us to “love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:21). Now he writes: “Therefore, ...” He is building on what he has just written about God’s word and loving one another.

He does so with a list of five sins of attitude and speech. We think of action sins as being the big ones, like do not murder, steal, or commit adultery. How I think, will come out in what I say, and then it can progress into action. James 4:11 commanded us “Do not speak evil of one another.” Then in James 5:9 he added, “Do not grumble against one another.” If I am to love others fervently, then I need to clean up my thinking. I need to be careful in what I say about other people. But if I am thinking correctly, then my speech will reflect the good attitude of my thoughts.

How can I do that? Some of our Bible translations follow the Greek sentence structure and show a comma at the end of 1 Pet. 2:1. After I lay aside, put away, get rid of these sins of thinking and speaking, then I am in a position where the Holy Spirit can teach me from God’s word how I should think. From that correct thinking I can begin to speak words that are honoring to God.

How do I lay aside, put away, get rid of these sins of thinking and speech? I confess those sins (and any others I have committed) and turn from them (1 John 1:9). Now I am in a place where God the Holy Spirit can teach me.

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word.” First, let’s not get the idea that Peter is writing to new believers when he says, “as newborn babes.” This is for every believer in Jesus Christ. All of us are to desire and feed on God’s word, just as a young baby desires its mother’s milk.

Then we have one of those textual variants. The *New King James Version* says that it is from the word of God that we “grow thereby” as do most of the ancient Bible manuscripts. But sometime in the past, a scribe in Egypt replaced the word translated “thereby” with the phrase “into salvation.” But Peter is writing to believers who have already been saved. All of us need the word of God for our spiritual growth as saved believers in Jesus Christ. No one Bible translation gets it correct every time. I appreciate the footnotes in my Bible that highlight the variants so that I can see the differences.

“If indeed.” Both the *New King James Version* and the *English Standard Version* add the word “indeed” to clarify that “yes” his readers were believers who have experienced the grace, kindness, and goodness of God.

I need to learn God’s word so that I will think the way God thinks, not the way the world thinks. When I think God’s thoughts, then I can speak words that show love for others and bring honor to God.



**Zebra Conchylodes, moth, Houston, Texas**

1 Pet. 2:4-6. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

These three verses cover a lot of ground. But the principal idea is one of relationship. I am a living stone and a part of this spiritual house. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone on which this house is built. I am just one of the stones in that house. All other believers, Jesus' Church, also are stones out of which the house is built. As I walk in obedience to God's commands, I am being built up as a part of Jesus' spiritual house.

Peter draws on the Old Testament story of the construction of the Jewish Temple, quoting Isa. 28:16. "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." I am sure that he also has in mind Jesus' statement in Matt. 16:18, "upon this rock I will build My church."

What is the "rock" upon which Jesus is building His church? To the Catholics, Peter is that rock. Many say that the "rock" is Peter's response to Jesus' question. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

But here in 1 Pet. 2:5, Jesus' Church ("spiritual house") is built on the rock, the cornerstone that is Jesus Himself. Also many verses in the Psalms describe God as a rock, such as Psa. 18:2. "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." This pictures the protection and provision that God gives us. He is faithful and keeps His promises.

As a part of this "spiritual house," I have a responsibility. I am to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." This brings to my mind Rom. 12:1-2 where Paul wrote, "that you present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (demonstrate in my life) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." As a believer in Jesus Christ in this age, no longer am I required to bring animal sacrifices to the temple. But my very life itself is to be a sacrifice to the glory of God.

I need to learn about God through His word. Then I am to put into practice what I have learned from God's word, in thinking the way he wants me to think and doing what he wants by to do.

"Put to shame." The New Testament epistles speak of shame from the standpoint of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ seeing all their works of wood, hay, and straw being burned up. 1 John 2:28 commands us: "Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

"Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.'" Peter is writing to believers. Peter may be applying this prophecy from Isa. 28:16 in the sense of a believer who continues walking by faith, "believes in Him," and not in the sense of having believed once and for all for salvation.

Some people think of this shame as being temporary since we will be in heaven and will spend eternity with God in the new heaven and new earth. I think of it as trying to describe a heavenly concept with an everyday word. The shame will be to see the rewards go up in flames that we could have received if we had set our minds "on things above, and not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). I need to continue walking by faith, offering spiritual sacrifices by learning God's word and then obeying Him and applying what I have learned.

1 Pet. 2:7-8. Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Because I believe in Jesus Christ and walk by faith, I can know how valuable, how precious He is. Jesus Christ is the one who is to be honored. He is precious.

The “builders” in this quotation from Psa. 118:22 are analogous or illustrative of the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus as their Messiah and had Him crucified. Jesus could turn water into wine, heal the blind, the crippled, the lepers, and even raise Lazarus from the dead, but they did not see Him as a conquering warrior who would run the Romans out of town. As Isa. 8:14 said, he was “a stone of stumbling.”

So, unbelievers who do not believe, were appointed in the past to not believe? Since most theologians find the idea of “double predestination” not to be compatible with God’s love and with a God who desires all to be saved, they say that it is the “doom” (*New American Standard Version*) or their judgment to which unbelievers have been appointed.

“Double predestination” is the mistaken theological premise that God has already decided that He will save some people and the others He has left in “just condemnation,” to be sent to the Lake of Fire with Satan and his fallen angels. The idea of predestination cannot logically be limited only to those whom God has chosen or elected to be saved. This idea focuses only on God’s sovereignty. What God has determined is what will be done. God is sovereign, but God did not do this in disregard to His other attributes, such as His love, justice, omniscience, omnipotence, ...

God created man in His own image. One aspect of that image is that man has the ability to make decisions. A just God would not command us to believe in Him if He did not give us the ability to believe in Him. God is omniscient. He knew what He was doing when He created this world. So Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 1:2, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” God is omnipotent, so knowing what all the cumulative choices of men would be, God has the power to fully execute the plan He decreed in eternity past.

I heard the gospel. I believed. Then God saved me. I was born again by God who gave me a human spirit by which I can have a relationship with God. He also credited to me the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross and paid the penalty for my sins and for the sins of every person, including the sin of Adam which has been credited to every descendant of Adam.

But these verses are not dealing with the issues of election or predestination at all. Understanding the statement, “to which they also were appointed” is difficult in the English. What is the antecedent of the word “which”? Thomas Constable’s *Notes* clarifies it. In English it appears that the word “which” refers to the “word” or possibly “disobedient.” But both these two words, “word” and “disobedient” in the Greek are masculine gender words, whereas the word “which” is neuter. Dr. Constable points out that those who are disobedient or disbelieving are appointed to stumble.

As Peter began this chapter in 1 Pet. 2:2, we, as believers, are to “desire the pure milk of the word.” For a believer who disbelieves or is disobedient to the correct teaching of God’s word, he will ultimately stumble in his spiritual life. Believers who neglect the teaching of God’s word or are misled by false teachers are disobedient to God. As a result they cannot correctly apply God’s word to life’s situations. Hence, they are appointed to stumble in their Christian lives.

1 Pet. 2:9-12. But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

“Chosen generation,” “priesthood,” “nation,” “special people.” Peter is addressing these descriptions to the Church, i.e. to believers in Jesus Christ. The Jewish believers who were the primary recipients of this letter, would understand the terms as similar to God’s choice of Israel in God’s promises to Abraham. Israel was to be a nation of priests (Exo. 19:6), but lost that position because of sin.

“Proclaim the praises of Him.” God’s purpose in creating this world is for His glory. I am to praise Him for all that He has done. He has saved me. I have received God’s mercy in that Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty for my sins. The Greek word for “proclaim” is where we get the English word “evangelize.” My world of friends needs to hear my praises to God.

“Sojourners and pilgrims.” “This world is not my home. I am just passing through.” Sounds like the words of a hymn.

“Abstain from fleshly lusts.” We think of lusts as illicit sexual desires. But this command is broader than that. Other translations render the word as “passions” or “desires.” The word is also sometimes translated as “covetousness.” In short: “Stop sinning.” Just say, “No,” to my sinful nature.

One of the realities of being a believer in Jesus Christ is that we are enemies of the world, i.e. of every unbeliever we meet. Our friends will say bad things about us and may hurt us in many ways. I am not to respond in like fashion. “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles” (unbelievers). My life needs to be characterized by good conduct and good works. My unbelieving friends need to not only hear my praise of God, but also to see God through my life.

“The day of visitation.” Jesus Christ is coming again to establish the Kingdom promised to Israel. “Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God.” Phil. 2:10-11. This will occur after the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15.

My wife’s childhood pastor, Dr. Dwight Pentecost, related the “day of visitation” to Jesus’ prophecy in Luke 19:41-44 of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when He said of Jerusalem, “you did not know the time of your visitation.” The Greek word translated “visitation” is the word translated “bishop” in 1Tim. 3:1, “If a man desires the position of a bishop.” Peter uses the verb form in 1 Pet. 5:2 where it is translated “serving as overseers.” “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.”

The idea I get from this is that someone is watching over me and my conduct among unbelievers. Is it God who is watching over believers and unbelievers for a time of future judgment? Is God also waiting in grace for unbelievers to observe the good conduct of believers so He can in grace save the unbelievers who believe in Jesus Christ? These are the positions of most of the commentaries I read.

But I see how 1 Pet. 2:12 could be saying that the “visitation” is the unbeliever overseeing or observing the good conduct of believers and praising God for it and maybe even believing in Jesus Christ.

1 Pet. 2:13-17. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

“Therefore”: Peter moves to the practical side of his letter. In 1 Pet. 2:12 he wrote about honorable conduct and “good works.” How do we do that?

We “submit to every ordinance of man.” We do this not to avoid punishment but “for the Lord’s sake.” We don’t cheat on our taxes? Do I also obey traffic laws? Paul gave us a similar command in Rom. 13:1. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

We have examples in Scripture when we should not “submit to every ordinance of man.” Some examples are: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Dan. 3:18; Daniel in Dan. 6:10; and “Peter and the *other* apostles” in Acts 5:29. This exception occurs when the laws and rules of men run contrary to God’s commands. Exo. 21:22-25 commands us not to harm an unborn child which unequivocally prohibits abortion. But this does not give believers the right to do damage to abortion clinics or even to picket clinics. Dr. Constable’s *Notes* are helpful. Christians should practice civil disobedience only when the government requires its citizens to disobey God, not when the government simply permits them to disobey Him.”

“For this is the will of God.” Do I want to know God’s will for my life? God gave me His word, so that I could learn what God’s will is. Peter writes that obeying those who rule over me including all those laws and regulations is God’s will. Now I don’t know “all the ignorance of foolish men” with which Peter’s original readers were contending. After all, the Caesar, Nero, was not a nice guy. But we have our own laws and regulations that God commands us to obey.

“As free.” We are not under the Mosaic Law. But that does not mean that I can live my life anyway I want to do. Again, Dr. Constable’s *Notes* had a good explanation of what “As free” meant. “Christians are free in the sense of being under no obligations to God in order to gain His acceptance. He has accepted us because of what Jesus Christ did for us.”

Then Peter gives a summary in four commands. “Honor all people.” We are created in the image of God. I am to have respect for all people.

“Love the brotherhood.” Even beyond my respect for all people, Jesus commanded His disciples in John 13:35. “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“Fear God.” I need to have an awe and reverence for God that leads me to obey His word. If I do not obey, I can expect to receive divine discipline during this life.

“Honor the king.” I may not like the things our governing leaders do. But I am to give them honor and respect. I may disagree with them, but God commands us not to malign, complain and grumble.



Cassin’s Kingbird, Alpine, Texas

1 Pet. 2:18-20. Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.

In 1 Pet. 2:12 Peter told us to have our “conduct honorable among the Gentiles” (unbelievers) that they may see our good works. He then went on to say that we should submit “to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” He now addresses believers who were household slaves to do their jobs well in obedience and submission to their masters.

Under the Mosaic Law the slaves were to be freed every sabbatical (seventh) year and to return to their family lands to begin again. If the slave wanted to remain enslaved and his master agreed, he could choose to do so for life. This was much like the indentured servants of colonial America. But in the non-Jewish world (Gentiles) slavery was a matter of conquer and enslave for life.

For us today, we can draw a parallel with employer/employee relations. Some employers might be called “good and gentle,” while others come across more as “harsh,” or “unreasonable,” “perverse” or “unjust” as various translations read. If the situation gets bad enough, we can leave and go find a different boss.

Paul addressed the responsibility of slaves to obey their masters in several of his letters. In Eph. 6:5-8 he wrote: “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* slave or free.” When I fulfill my duties and responsibilities before my employer and others in authority over me, I am serving the Lord. When I do this well, He will repay me. This sounds like my future evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Whatever my situation is, I can expect to face difficulties, problems and hardships, not only in my job, but also in every aspect of life. As Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” Peter tells me how to handle these adversities. If I mess up and suffer, take the consequences patiently. If I do things the right way and suffer, I can still take it patiently. God knows and His grace covers the situation now, and throughout eternity.



Western Meadowlark, Lory State Park, Bellvue, Colorado

1 Pet. 2:21-25. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

“For to this you were called.” When I heard the call of God and believed in Jesus Christ, did I expect a life of luxury, and ease, and no more problems? Well, in reality, I was only nine years old. I knew I was a sinner and by placing my trust in Jesus Christ, I would be saved from the penalty of those sins and receive eternal life.

By believing in Jesus Christ, I made myself an enemy of the world. I still live in this world, but I am a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20). Jesus suffered more than I will ever be called upon to suffer. With one word He could have ended it all. He remained faithful and fulfilled God’s plan. I am to be faithful in my obedience to God’s commands, just as the faithful servant of 1 Pet. 2:20 did good and was beaten for it.

How do I handle adversity in my life? In the previous verse, the ill-treated slave who does good and suffers for it, receives grace (is commendable) “before God.” Do I speak out against those who do me wrong? Do I threaten to get even? Do I take the easy way out and just do as the world would have me to do? When I make a commitment or a promise and realize that it was not a good idea, do I keep my word or seek a way to get out of that promise?

Heb. 5:8 says that Jesus “learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” In His humanity Jesus learned, not from His mistakes (as we often do), but by faithfully obeying God. God allows adversities in my life, so I can learn to apply His word to each situation.

Note that this passage does not say that when I was called that I would follow in Jesus’ steps. It says that I “should follow in His steps.” 1 Pet. 2:24 says that I “might live for righteousness.” It doesn’t say that I will live for righteousness. I need to learn from God’s word how God wants me to think, to speak, and to do. Then it is up to me to decide to do so. Just because I have believed in Jesus Christ, have been born again, and am a new creation in Christ, does not automatically result in my doing what God wants me to do.

“By whose stripes you were healed.” My charismatic brothers in Christ sometimes read this verse differently than I do. In this statement healing is past tense. When I believed in Jesus Christ, this healing occurred. I received eternal life and received the forgiveness of my sins. This statement is not speaking about physical healing in any sense.

This whole passage is Peter’s commentary on Isa. 53:5-9 and confirms that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy.



Ring-billed Gull, near Matagorda, Texas

1 Pet. 3:8-12. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their prayers; But the face of the LORD *is* against those who do evil."

Peter has finished telling us to submit to government leaders, employees to employers, and the proper relationships of husbands and wives. With the word "Finally," he summarizes how we should live.

"Be of one mind." We don't always agree with everyone. But we can cooperate even with our individual differences.

"Having compassion." I should have sympathy for the problems, adversities, and difficulties that others are going through.

"Love as brothers." Remember what Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another."

"Be tenderhearted." A reiteration of the need for affection and compassion for others.

"Be courteous." Courtesy is a demonstration of humility. I put the needs of others before my own.

"Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling." Prov. 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath." As Isa. 53:7 prophesied about Christ, "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth."

"On the contrary blessing." Peter does not use the word usually translated "bless" or "blessing." Think of this "blessing" as a good spoken word. This is praise or a commendation. How do I respond when someone curses me out and tells me all the wrong things I have ever done? Often it is best to follow the example of Jesus and just keep silent. But then when the tirade ends, is there something good that I can say in reply?

"You were called to this." Nothing that happens is a surprise to God. In Eternity Past God wrote the script for everything that happens in this world. God knew that Adam would choose to disobey Him and would eat the forbidden fruit. God's Plan for the ages includes all the choices and decisions that we His creatures would make. God in His omnipotence still accomplishes His ultimate purpose. God knew every adversity I would face in life. If I respond to being cursed out with a word of blessing, I can expect to "inherit a blessing." i.e. another good word. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Peter backs up his summary with a quotation from Psa. 34:12-16 with five commands: (1) "Refrain his tongue from evil." (2) "Turn away from evil." (3) "Do good." (4) "Seek peace." (5) "Pursue it."

When I walk with the Lord, in obedience to His commands, I have His promise: "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers."



**Blackburnian Warbler, South Padre Island Nature Center, Texas**



1 Pet. 3:13-15. And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, *you are* blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

“And who is he who will harm you ...?” I see a parallel between this verse and Rom. 8:31. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” I don’t think Peter is saying that “doing good” is an insurance policy protecting me from harm. Particularly when I read the next verse, “But even if you should suffer ...” Compared to the greatness of God, a person who would harm a person doing good is a nobody. He will come to nothing.

“If you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.” Peter uses a different Greek word for “blessed” than he had used for “blessing” in 1 Pet. 2:12. The “blessing” in verse 12 was a spoken blessing, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This is the reward following the verbal commendation. I remember the promise in James 1:12, ‘Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life.’ When I handle any of the adversities of life by correctly applying God’s word to the situation, I can expect a future reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Peter then quotes a verse from Isa. 8:12. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” Isaiah warned King Ahaz to turn from his worship of idols and return to God. Isaiah prophesied during a difficult time in Israel. 2 Kings 16 tells the sad story of Ahaz. Ahaz was the king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Assyria was invading Syria and both the kingdoms of Israel. Syria and Israel wanted Judah to join up with them to fight against Assyria. They attacked Jerusalem, but were not successful. Instead, Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria taking gold and silver from the Temple to pay tribute to Assyria. Assyria did conquer Syria and Israel carrying them into captivity. Ahaz died and his son, Hezekiah, became king. Under Isaiah’s ministry Hezekiah “did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 18:3). Then God gave Hezekiah a major victory when Assyria invaded Judah.

Isaiah counseled Ahaz in Isa. 8:13, “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow (sanctify); *Let Him be* your fear, And *let Him be* your dread.” So how should I deal with my unbelieving friends who are out to get me? Peter’s answer:

“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” We use the word “heart” in a different sense than people in the ancient world. In Peter’s day, the heart was the center of a person’s thinking, not the emotions.

To “sanctify” means to set the Lord God apart in our minds. He should be the focus of our attention. We can look at this world in which we live and know that it did not just happen, as in, “Once upon a time, there was a big bang,” but must have been created by an omnipotent God (Rom.1:20). But to know anything more about God, we need to know His word which He has given us,

The better I know God’s word, the better prepared I can be “to give a defense to everyone who asks” a reason for my confidence in the future God has for me.



**Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Pedernales Falls State Park, Texas**

1 Pet. 3:16-18. having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,

Peter continues his discussion of the suffering and adversity that we as believers face and will face in our lives. At the present time, Satan is the ruler of the world. That is why when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness that Satan could offer Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5-9). This is why when I try to re-arrange the furniture in my life to avoid problems, difficulties, and adversities, it never seems to work out as I would like. I solve one problem and another pops up.

“Having a good conscience.” Paul wrote in Gal. 5:14, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” James wrote the same thing even earlier in James 2:8, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well.” Peter expects that his readers will keep a good conscience before God. But that does not stop the unbelieving world around us from condemning and judging us.

“May be ashamed.” There is a future judgment coming for all of us. For believers we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). While Jesus’ death has paid the penalty for my sins, my life will be evaluated for how well I have obeyed God’s word in my walk as a Christian.

For unbelievers, their judgment will occur at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. Their names are not found written in the Book of Life, so the books of works are opened and all their good deeds do not come up to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

For every person at these judgments, there is the potential for shame. For the believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ there can be shame at the loss of potential rewards over and beyond God’s gift of eternal life. For an unbeliever at the Great White Throne Judgment there will be shame that his good was not good enough.

“If it is the will of God.” We don’t suffer evil every time we do good. But the reality of life is that there will be times when I do everything according to God’s expressed will for me, i.e. I obey what He has commanded me to do in His word, that I will suffer verbal abuse from other people and may even suffer in other ways. That is not the aspect of God’s will that Peter is writing about here.

In Eternity Past God decreed everything that would happen in this world He created. This is the will of God that He has decreed and is unfolding for us day by day, moment by moment. This decreed will of God includes that each human being has the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey. God allows us to choose to disobey. The result is that even as a believer in Jesus Christ, there will be times when I do things God’s way, that I will suffer abuse from other people. God in His decreed will allows this. It may be in discipline for things I have done wrong. It can also be for the purpose of training me to apply God’s word to the situation that I may grow toward spiritual maturity.

Finally, in 1 Pet. 3:18, Peter gives us the ultimate example of undeserved suffering which is Jesus Christ. Christ’s death paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world. God gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and Jesus’ death covers the penalty for their sins.



**Mangrove Cuckoo, South Padre Island Convention Center, Texas**

1 Pet. 4:7-10. But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.* As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Peter covers a lot of ground in these four verses. First, “the end of all things is at hand.” Peter wrote this over 2,000 years ago and it hasn’t happened. But the truth remains. Jesus’ return could occur at any moment. I need to live my life with that expectation. I don’t want to be caught by surprise with my proverbial hand in the cookie jar when I hear His shout and the trumpet.

“Be sober and watchful in your prayers.” My thinking needs to be clear. I need to pray with the viewpoint of God as revealed in His word.

“Have fervent love for one another.” Love is what should set a believer in Jesus Christ apart from the rest of the world. We are not wired to love others, but to love ourselves. The Holy Spirit produces this fervent love in believers, as we learn and apply God’s word in our lives.

“Love will cover a multitude of sins.” Peter quotes this statement from Prov. 10:12. We think of hate as being the opposite of love. When I was in college my pastor made a point that fear was the opposite of love. He made this point well in his sermon. But I take Peter’s point here that “love will cover a multitude of sins” to mean that there are a plethora of sins that show a lack of love for others. When I grumble and complain about another, how does this show love? If I steal something that belongs to another, how does this show love? If I tell lies or tell others all the bad things someone has done, does this show love?

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” The early Christians traveled throughout the world carrying the message of the gospel and God’s word. There were not a half dozen hotels at every crossroads. Hospitality was a spiritual gift as indicated by 1 Pet. 4:10. Hospitality is a way that believers can show fervent love for one another.

3 John 5-8 is an often overlooked passage on hospitality. “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have born witness of your love before the church. *If you send them forward on their way in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.*” In this situation John was speaking of not only being a good host or hostess when we entertain guests, but sending them away well supplied for their journey. If our guests are missionaries or other Christian workers, we are sharing in their ministry.

Speaking of spiritual gifts: “As each one has received a gift ...” The Holy Spirit has given each believer a spiritual gift for the purpose of ministering to other believers. Hospitality is one of those gifts. There are several others mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. We may not even know what our spiritual gift is. It is not something about which we should obsess. As we love one another, we will see opportunities where we can minister to other believers. This is the purpose of spiritual gifts: to be able to minister to and to help other believers.



**Black-legged Kittiwake, Shoreacres, Texas**

1 Pet. 4:11-13. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Sometimes my memory verse cards overlap two paragraphs of thought as with these three verses. In 1 Pet. 4:10 Peter introduced the subject of spiritual gifts. In 1 Pet. 4:12 he summarizes the gifts into two major groups that correspond to the two different leadership roles in a church. Those who speak, i.e. called in the New Testament synonymously as pastors, bishops (overseers) and elders; and those who minister, deacons. In verse 10 Peter had said that “each one” of us receives a gift. So every believer is to minister his gift to other believers for the growth of the church. Although all believers do not serve as an elder or a deacon, we all have a responsibility to serve as ministers to other believers.

Spiritual gifts function through the power of the Holy Spirit. God provides us this ability to serve. The purpose is to bring glory to God, not to the person serving or ministering. The apostle Paul gave more detailed lists of gifts. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:8-10, some gifts no longer function, such as tongues, prophecy, miracles and healing. But the speaking gifts of pastor-teacher and evangelism still operate, as do ministry gifts of hospitality, giving, helps, encouragement, and others not named.

Peter again brings up the issue of adversities. It is amazing how often the Bible talks about the “fiery trials” we face daily in our lives, and how little we hear about them from the pulpit. When Peter described our trials as “fiery,” he points us back to 1 Pet. 1:6-7, “...you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, ...” Both the words “fire” and “fiery” refer to the refining process where impurities in gold are removed by fire. This is analogous to what happens in the life of every believer. Daily we face trials, difficulties, adversities. Many are minor, like a mosquito or gnat buzzing us. But sometimes we will face the stampede of a herd of bison or elephants. God allows us to face these adversities so we can learn to trust Him. This is a sanctifying process and leads to spiritual growth.

Whether it is the gnat or the elephant, now is when I need to draw on what I have learned from God’s word. If God’s word is true and as Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 1:2-3: that God’s word contains everything I need “for life and godliness,” my reaction and response needs to be based on what God has said.

Peter’s command here is that I am to rejoice in these trials and adversities, even to the point of partaking in Christ’s sufferings. Remember that Jesus’ sufferings culminated in His death. I write this in October 2023 a few days after the Hamas/Hezbollah war broke out in Israel. Last week I met a Messianic Jew who is a missionary in Israel. His son has been called up in the IDF and today his wife and younger daughters are hunkered down in a bomb shelter. The missionary was able to buy the last ticket on an El Al flight back to Israel. We don’t know what it means to suffer for Jesus!

“That when His glory is revealed.” There is a time coming when the whole world will see the glory of Jesus Christ. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, will “be glad with exceeding joy” because we will see first hand the revelation of His glory. Jude 14 tells us that Enoch prophesied about this, “The Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints.”

1 Pet. 4:14-16. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Living in the United States we have been sheltered from the persecutions and sufferings that have characterized those who were faithful to God in the past. Look at Noah, who maintained a faithful testimony about God for 120 years while he built the Ark. But in the end, after the death of Methusaleh, there were only eight believers left when God closed the door of the Ark. Of Jesus’ disciples, only John did not die a martyr’s death.

My wife and I support or pray for missionaries in Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, all nations suffering because of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. We hear first hand reports of the suffering going on in that area and how believers in Jesus Christ are remaining faithful. As I watch our nation moving further and further away from the truth of God’s word, I see the potential for more persecution in the future.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” Peter’s words recall the promise of one of the beatitudes of blessing Jesus gave in Matt. 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

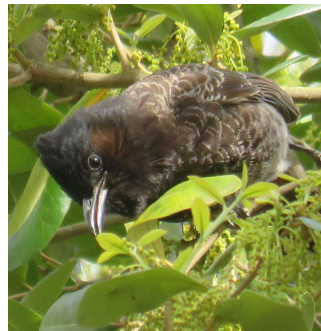
What is this “reward in heaven” that Jesus promises to reviled and persecuted believers? It is not eternal life or the forgiveness of our sins which we receive by faith in Jesus Christ. The “reward in heaven” is for enduring the persecution. As James 1:12 says, “Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

“Blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” Peter is telling us how we should react to reproaches and persecution. The Holy Spirit empowers us, if we allow Him to do so. We are to rest in God and His promises. As Moses said in Exo. 14:13 to the people of Israel when Pharaoh reneged on his agreement to let the people of Israel go, “Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.” God knows what we are facing and has made provision for us.

“On their part He is blasphemed.” Peter does not tell us what was being said that was blasphemy. The false ideas about God undoubtedly change over time. Did God create this world 6,000-8,000 years ago by speaking it into existence, or did this world just happen once upon a time 13 plus billion years ago with a big bang? Is God glorified or blasphemed when before He even created the world, He is said to have picked some people to save, but to leave the rest of the world in just condemnation, totally unable to believe in Him. This latter is the fatalism of eastern religions that Augustine imported into the church when he converted to Romanism.

“Let none of you suffer as a ...” Peter makes clear that suffering for the name of Christ does not include just punishment for disobeying the laws of God and human authority.

“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian ...” Yes, as Christians, we will suffer. This is my opportunity to glorify God by practicing faith in His promises.



**Red-Vented Bulbul, Heights area, Houston, Texas**

1 Pet. 5:1-4. The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Peter in his introduction to both of his letters, calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here he adds that he is a “fellow elder” when he addresses the elders in the churches to which he was writing.

“And a witness of the sufferings of Christ.” Peter obviously was a witness of all the ordeals Jesus went through in His ministry, and also of Jesus’ ultimate trials and death on the cross. When Peter uses the words “I who am ...,” he may be referring to the ongoing suffering of believers for Christ’s sake. Peter does not give us details of the sufferings he experienced in his ministry. We know from the traditions of the Roman Church that he was also crucified.

“Shepherd the flock ... serving as overseers.” The word for “overseers” is the same word that is sometimes translated “bishops.” Also the word “shepherd” comes from the same root as the word translated “pastor.” The words are used interchangeably in the New Testament. They are synonymous. They do not refer to different levels of ecclesiastical authority in the church. As used biblically an elder is a pastor and also a bishop.

The pastor is to serve willingly. He also should not serve for the purpose of financial gain. While I, as a church member, have an obligation before God to give money to the church, for the support of its ministry and particularly the pastor, that should not be the pastor’s motivation. Under the Mosaic Law Israel was to pay three tithes. Every year they were to pay one of those tithes for the support of the Levites who were their priests.

The elder’s or pastor’s life should be an example for how each believer in his church should live.

“You will receive the crown of glory.” I understand this to be a special commendation or reward that Jesus Christ will give at the Judgment Seat of Christ to pastors who faithfully shepherd and oversee their congregations, leading them to spiritual maturity. This is the most explicit statement of this reward, but it is alluded to elsewhere.

Paul wrote to the Philippians in Phil. 2:16, “Holding fast the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run or labored in vain.” John was more explicit in 2 John 8, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we have worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.” John seems to be saying when he uses the word “we” that if the recipients of this letter were to succumb to the errors of false teachers that both those who bought into the false teaching and John could lose a reward at Judgment seat of Christ.

So what is my take away from this instruction to elders? As a former pastor used to like to say at the end of a message, “How should I then live?” I need to know God’s word and His promises, so that when I am presented with any adversity or difficulty of life, I may respond properly as God wants me to do. I also need to know God’s word so well that I can “discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14), to discern what is true and what is a false interpretation and application.



**Cattle Tyrant, a Central American ship stowaway, Corpus Christi, Texas**

1 Pet. 5:5-7. Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Today’s subject is humility. First, there is the command to the younger people, maybe better understood as young adults, which would include teenagers. The elders to whom I should submit obviously include my pastor mentioned in 1 Pet. 5:1-4. But as the next statement (“be submissive to one another”) makes clear, it also includes those who are older and wiser than I am.

“Be submissive to one another.” When I was a sophomore college student, a fellow IVCF member called me aside to talk to me about my driving. I don’t remember if he was in his junior or senior year. When this happens people can react in many ways. Peter tells us God’s way. “Be submissive to one another.”

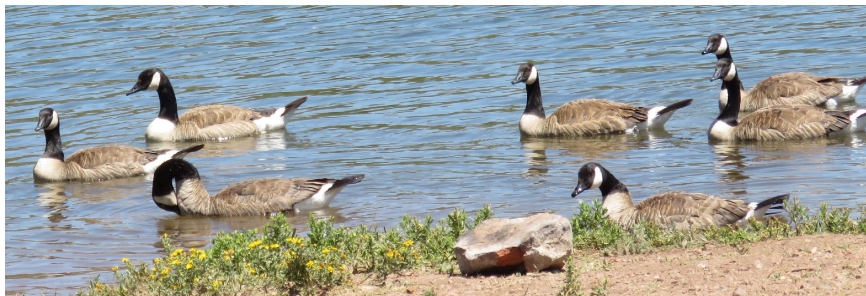
“Be clothed with humility.” The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* pointed out that the Greek verb “Be clothed” refers to an apron (think, overalls) that a slave or a servant would wear to do the work his master has asked him to do.

“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.” Peter was writing to believers who were suffering persecution. God was permitting or allowing this persecution to happen. These believers were to remain obedient to God even in these difficult and adverse circumstances. Peter gives them the first of two promises to apply.

Promise #1. “That He may exalt you in due time.” These persecutions may pass at some time in the future and your situation improve. But even if you are obedient to God to the point of death, as has happened to many believers over the ages, God will exalt you. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Promise #2: “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” A short and simple verse which many of us have memorized without knowing the context. The command is to “humble” myself. The way I do that is by turning the persecutions, problems, difficulties, and adversities over to God. I don’t need to try to find a human solution which is what the world would have me do. I am to continue to obey God and be faithful to Him.

If I know God’s word, then I can do what James says in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” As Peter also wrote in 2 Pet. 1:3, God “has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” I need to learn these “all things” that God has given me, so that I can handle every adversity in life.



**Canada Goose, Lory State Park, near Fort Collins, Colorado**

1 Pet. 5:8-11. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

These verses contain a few textual variants. The first is a throw-away word right out of the chute, “because.” It adds nothing to our understanding of the text and is not found either in the Critical Text which most modern translations use, nor in the Majority Text. The pronoun “us” in 1 Pet. 5:10 as in “who called us” reads “you” both in the Majority Text and the Critical Text. In this case, I am sure that Peter could have included himself in this statement. Whether the text should read “us” or “you” is not significant.

A third textual variant is also found in 1 Pet. 5:10 where the mood of the verbs, “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” differs in the Critical Text from the other texts. The Critical Text makes it read like a promise that God will absolutely do this, while the *New King James Version* reads like Peter is praying that God “may ... perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” It looks to me that if this is a promise that we can forget about the commands in 1 Pet. 5:8-9. We don’t need to “be sober, be vigilant,” and to “resist him” because God is going to “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle” us through the sufferings and adversities of life.

“Be sober.” I need to be self-controlled in my thinking. I need to think God’s way, applying God’s word to every situation and adversity in my life. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, how did Jesus respond? Each time, Jesus answered Satan with a statement from Scripture. How well I can obey this command to “be sober,” depends on how well I know God’s word.

“Be vigilant” or watchful. Satan is tricky. He is a liar and a deceiver. In the wilderness when Jesus answered Satan with Scripture, Satan quoted Scripture on his own, twisting it and misapplying it. Heb. 5:14 talks about mature believers who have their “senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” A couple of verses earlier in Heb. 5:12 the writer had told his readers that they need someone to teach them “again the first principles of the oracles of God.” Satan has so filled this world with his lies that it is tough sometimes to know what is right and what is wrong.

“Resist him, steadfast in the faith.” By coupling the command to “resist” the devil with the statement “steadfast in the faith,” Peter is telling me that I need to hold on to what I know is the truth from God’s word. The better I know that truth, the better I can resist the lies and deceptions of Satan.

God allows us to face the sufferings and adversities of life that we may grow in our faith. God wants to “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle” me in my faith in God. He can only do that when I apply His word correctly to every adversity I face.

“Knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” I am not alone in this battle. Every believer in Jesus Christ faces problems, difficulties and adversities in their lives.



**Blue-headed Vireo, Salineño Wildlife Preserve, Texas**



2 Pet. 1:1-4. Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter begins by stating his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. We do not have apostles today. The Greek word refers to a person who has been sent out by another. In this case Peter and the rest of the apostles were specifically authorized by Jesus Christ to carry the message of God’s truth to the world. One of the requirements for being an apostle was that an apostle had to be an eye witness of Jesus after His resurrection (Acts 1:20-22). No one living today can fulfill that requirement.

“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us ...” God commands us to believe in Jesus Christ. The God in whom I believe is a God of justice. He would not command me to do something that He did not also give me the ability to do. So in 1947 I heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ. But my faith did not save me. God had promised that if I believed in Jesus Christ that He, God, would give me eternal life.

“In the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” In the English we can read God and Savior as two different entities, but in the Greek it clearly states that God and our Savior Jesus Christ are the same. Jesus Christ, my Savior, is also God.

“As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him ...” Peter uses a form of the Greek word for “knowledge” that adds a prefix to the word. Preachers often refer to this as “full knowledge” or “complete knowledge.” I need to learn God’s word so well and build it into my life and thinking, so that I will think the way God wants me to think. God’s word has the answers for every situation I will face in life.

Let me give a personal example for how I think this “full knowledge” might work. When I was in grad school we were told to read a paper written by a couple of egghead MIT professors. We were told that if we did not learn what the paper said we would not graduate. I read it and thought, “This is obvious. It is simple.” I forgot all about it. Guess what? I flunked the comprehensive exam I needed to pass to graduate. My advisor called me in – “on the carpet.” They were going to give me a second chance. God’s grace! I went back and read the paper again. I passed the comp the second time and graduated. But contrary to when we cram for an exam, and then quickly forget, the principles and ideas in that paper have been the foundation of my thinking throughout my work career. It may have been simple and obvious. But until I made it a frame of reference in my thinking, it was not useful to me.

The same applies with God’s word. We can read Scripture and hear sermons and Bible teachers. By the time we have finished eating Sunday dinner, we promptly forget everything we heard because it is “old hat.” Then during the week, when we face issues and adversities of our daily lives, we grub around for our own solutions. What we should do, is respond immediately with God’s solution as He has given it to us in His word.



**Wilson’s Snipe, Hazel Bazemore Park, Corpus Christi, Texas**

2 Pet. 1:5-9. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

“But also for this very reason ...” For the reason that I may become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). In 2 Pet. 1:1 Peter said he was writing to believers. So partaking of the divine nature is something more than being saved. This is how I am to live as a Christian.

“Add to your faith ...” I became a Christian by faith, by believing in Jesus Christ, and God saved me. Now I need to add something else. These are the ingredients for my spiritual growth. “Virtue” or moral purity, obedience to God’s commands for moral living. “Knowledge” is the basic word for knowing something, in particular God’s word. “Self-control,” discipline, not giving in to every whim or desire of my sin nature.

“Perseverance.” If every believer in Jesus Christ had perseverance then Peter would not have had to include perseverance in the command that I am to add to my faith, i.e. to my walk in the Christian life.

“Godliness ... brotherly kindness ... love.” As I grow spiritually then my life should reflect more of these qualities. “Brotherly kindness,” is love for family, friends, neighbors. But “love” is the familiar Greek word “agape” which expands the horizon to include the welfare of others more than your own. The “others” includes everyone.

Does every believer produce fruit in his life? There are some preachers that teach this. But that is not how fruit bearing works in the real world. Whether it is a tomato plant, an oak, or pecan tree, the tomatoes, acorns or nuts are not going to show up until the plant or tree reaches a certain maturity. So it is with the Christian life. My spiritual life can be barren or unfruitful if I have not grown to the point that I begin to show these characteristics that Peter has just written.

2 Pet. 1:9 tells us that even a believer in Jesus Christ may lack self-control or perseverance or godliness or brotherly kindness or love. He has become blind to this great salvation that God has given him. He has even forgotten that He was “cleansed from his old sins.” In fact, he is now generating new sins in his life and is no longer partaking of the divine nature.

I pointed out that in 2 Pet. 2:5 that Peter wrote that we were to add “knowledge,” the basic word for knowing. But in 2 Pet. 1:8 he adds a prefix to the Greek word for knowledge that some preachers call “full knowledge.” This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Rom. 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” As a believer, I want to renew my mind with God’s word making it a part of my way of thinking, so that I automatically react to whatever comes my way in the manner God wants me to do.



**Black-capped Vireo, near Kerrville, Texas**

2 Pet. 1:10-12 . Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.

These verses are a challenge for interpretation. I know I am saved because I believe God and His word. My works will never be good enough to prove that I am truly worthy of God’s eternal salvation that He has given me. So why does Peter command to “be even more diligent to make your call and election sure”?

Jesus, in making application to one of His parables in Matt. 20:16, said, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” He uses the same order of events as Peter uses here, First, “call,” then “chosen” or “election.” My understanding follows that of those who understand that this “election,” of which Peter writes, is not to eternal salvation. This understanding arises from the context. 2 Pet. 1:9 says of those who fail to diligently add to their faith, that they have still been cleansed from their old sins, i.e. they are believers. Then the second half of 2 Pet. 1:10 says that those who make their “call and election sure” will never stumble. If we don’t diligently add to our faith, and as a result stumble, have we lost our salvation, or were never saved? The word “stumble” is always used in the sense of a believer’s “personal failure in the Christian life” (Dr. Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*). “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, ...” (James 3:2).

“Therefore.” Peter is following up on what he wrote beginning in 2 Pet. 1:5 where he commanded me to be diligent in adding to my faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Now I am to be even more diligent to do these things. If I do so, what is the result? I “will never stumble.” While I walk with the Lord, learning and applying His word, utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit, I will not sin. But when I give in to the desires of my sin nature and the thinking of the world, I will stumble or fail. 1 John 3:6 says, “Whoever abides in Him does not sin.”

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life (eternal life), and that they may have it more abundantly.” Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ receives eternal life and will enter into the everlasting kingdom. But there is something above and beyond the gift of eternal life. Jesus adds to the life believers receive, “may have it more abundantly.” Peter wrote in today’s passage “an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” So my take on this passage is that this more abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom is for those who are diligent in building their faith by adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

Peter then writes of the importance of not being “negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.” This was not new stuff that Peter was writing to these fellow believers. Peter was writing to believers who had been taught these things before. But as we all do, they needed to be reminded of it and encouraged to continue to walk faithfully in their Christian lives.



**Swamp Sparrow, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

2 Pet. 1:13-15. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding *you*, knowing that shortly I *must* put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

Do I tune out my pastor during his messages because “I have heard all this stuff before?” Peter was writing this letter to people who had already been taught these things. Peter thought they needed to be reminded. We learn by repetition. Of what has Peter already reminded his readers in this letter?

In 2 Pet. 1:3 Peter wrote, as God’s “divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” If I want to live a life that honors and glorifies God, I need to know His word. I need to know it so well that I automatically react to the circumstances of life in a manner that is pleasing to God.

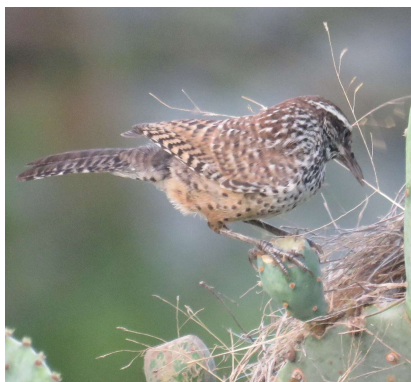
In 2 Pet. 1:4, God has “given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.” In Amos 3:1-2, the prophet warned that God would discipline Israel because of their iniquities (sins). In Amos 3:3 he wrote: “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” If I want to be a partaker of God’s divine nature in this life, I need to obey Him. I can’t obey Him unless I know how He wants me to think and what He wants me to do. That means I need to know what these promises are and what His word tells me to do and to think.

In 2 Pet. 1:5-7, I need to add to my faith, virtue plus knowledge, plus self-control, plus perseverance, plus godliness, plus brotherly kindness, and to top all this off, love. Then in 2 Pet. 1:8, as a believer bearing fruit in my spiritual life, I need to have the knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ which I learn from God’s word.

I should never forget that I have been cleansed from my old sins. This is 2 Pet. 1:9. What about my present sins? 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Then in 2 Pet. 1:10-11, Peter wrote that if I do these things, I will not stumble. Then my entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be supplied to me abundantly. Will I receive a commendation from Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? I know I fail in many ways. I reiterate what Paul wrote in Phil. 3:12-14. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” I take it that the upward call is Jesus’ shout Paul wrote about in 1 Thess. 4:16-17, when Jesus descends with a shout. All believers are caught up together “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

I still have a long way to go in my spiritual life. Paul did not think he had attained or been perfected when he wrote Philippians. I know I certainly haven’t either. I pray that I may be able to keep on keeping on. Some day soon, I look forward to hearing that “shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God,” and we will all be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.”



**Cactus Wren, Uvalde, Texas**

2 Pet. 1:16-18. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

“Were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” Peter is writing about the time when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray. While they were there Jesus was “transfigured” (Matt. 17:1-3) and Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. “His face shown like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.” God showed Peter, along with James and John, a vision of how Jesus will appear when He returns to restore the Kingdom to Israel. We call this future event the Second Coming of Christ.

The outline of the order of future events as I understand them are:

- 1). The Rapture when Jesus descends from heaven and we (believers) are “caught up” (the Latin word that Jerome used for the Greek word is “rapturo” from which we get our word “rapture.”) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall ever be with the Lord.”
- 2). The seven year Tribulation, the seventieth week of Dan. 9:24-27. The Tribulation is also described in more detail in Rev. 6-18.
- 3). The Second Coming of Christ which Peter discusses in these verses and is also prophesied in Rev. 19:11-21.
- 4). The restoration of the kingdom for Israel with Christ as the ruler over all the world for a period of 1,000 years. (Rev. 20:1-7).
- 5). The final Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15.
- 6). The new heaven and new earth where we will spend eternity with Jesus Christ who continues to rule over all the world and the fulfillment of the eternal promises to Abraham and David (Rev. 21-22).

Peter wrote 2 Pet. 1:16-18 as an eyewitness of this vision of Jesus’ future “honor and glory.” Peter also heard “this voice which came from heaven” saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5).

In the next chapter of this letter Peter will move to the subject of false teachers. Here he is setting the stage by presenting his authority to warn about false teachers. Peter was an eye witness and knew first-hand what Jesus had taught.

Why should I learn all this stuff about prophecy? I need something that I can use right now. But that is exactly why God gave us future prophecy. We can know how every thing will eventually turn out. As Jesus said in John 14:1-3 when He told His disciples about the future Rapture, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” Then He told them about the dwelling places they would have in the “Father’s house,” and that Jesus would “come again and receive you to Myself.”



**Northern Shoveler, Sewer Ponds, Junction, Texas**

2 Pet. 1:19-21. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

This is an important passage of Scripture. But understanding it is challenging because our translations present different approaches to the text. After reading through the usual commentaries and particularly Dr. Thomas Constable’s *Notes* and Dr. Kenneth Wuest’s *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, this is what I understand that Peter is telling us..

“So we have the prophetic word confirmed.” Peter’s experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18) is not a confirmation of the accuracy of the Old Testament prophecies as this word order suggests. We should not look at experience as a confirmation of Scripture. We should use Scripture to understand and appreciate our life experiences. *The NETBible* reorders the words: “We possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing.” Bible prophecies are reliable on their own. They are “a light that shines in a dark place.” The dark place is this world in which we live.

“Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Today, we know the “morning star” as the planet Venus. It appears at the end of the night, just before the dawn of a new day comes. The return of Jesus Christ in the Rapture will usher in a new day for the world.

“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” Some people read this and follow the lead of the Roman Church. “We can’t even begin to understand Bible prophecy.” It is as if, they quit reading at 2 Pet. 1:20, and never read 2 Pet. 1:21. Context is important. Again *The NETBible* helps. “No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination.” Of course, I don’t see using the word “imagination” as a literal translation, but the point is that the prophecies of Scripture were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As 2 Pet. 1:21 says: “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Bible prophecy is not some wild idea of the authors. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The writers of Scripture wrote with their own vocabulary and style, but what they wrote were the words of the Holy Spirit. They wrote the truth of God’s word. God expects me to learn it and to use it in my life. This is true, even of prophecy.

When I was in college, the church I attended had a prophecy conference. I had tried to figure out future prophecy on my own from the notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible* that my parents gave me when I was twelve years old. But that was not easy. I enjoyed that first prophecy conference and learned a lot. Then when I was in graduate school in Philadelphia, Dr. John Walvoord taught a special conference at the church there. I began to understand the order of the future events better: Rapture, Tribulation, Second Advent of Jesus Christ, Millennium, Great White Throne Judgment, and New Heaven and New Earth. Knowing the outline, I could begin to fill in the details from Scripture.

Prophecy is one of the gifts that God has given us. He expects me to learn it. Through prophecy I see an illustration of how great God is. I can see God’s love, His justice, His omnipotence, His truth, His immutability. All of these and more are revealed through the prophecies of the Bible.

God gave us prophecy to encourage and comfort us as we face the trials of life. Jesus began His prophecy of the Rapture in John 14:1 with these words, “Let not your heart be troubled.” Paul concluded his famous passage on the Rapture in 1 Thess. 4:18 saying, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

2 Pet. 2:1-3 . But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

In 2 Pet. 1:21 Peter discussed the Old Testament prophets that they “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Now Peter reminds his readers that not all the prophets in the Old Testament spoke messages from God. Also, in our own time, not all Bible teachers speak the truth all the time. I pray that God would teach me His word through His gifted teachers so that I can discern the truth that God wants me to know: “to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Why did Peter switch from prophets to teachers? “There will be false teachers among you.” Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13:8 that prophecies would be done away. When Peter wrote about spiritual gifts in 1 Pet. 4:9-11, he mentioned hospitality, speaking and ministering. He did not mention prophecy as a spiritual gift. It is likely that by the time that Peter wrote his two letters that the spiritual gift of prophecy had already ceased to function.

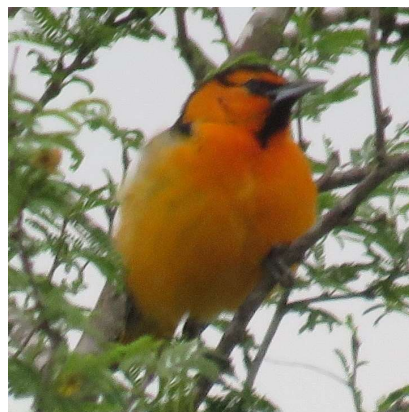
Were these false teachers saved? 2 Pet. 2:9 says, “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” 2 Pet. 2:17 says “The blackness of darkness forever” is reserved for them. So a strong case can be made that they are unbelievers.

What is the heresy that they teach? “Even denying the Lord who bought them.” They deny Jesus Christ “who bought them.” Many theologians teach that Jesus died only for the few whom God chose in eternity past to be saved. They say that Jesus did not die to pay the penalty for the sins of unbelievers. But even if Peter’s false teachers were unbelievers, this verse says that Jesus still died for them and paid the penalty for their sins and false teaching.

The *New King James Version* mentions “follow their destructive ways.” Other translations render this as “sensuality,” “debauched lifestyles,” “pernicious ways,” or “depraved conduct.” I think these alternate readings better fit with the next verse that says these false teachers exploit their listeners “by covetousness.” It sounds like Peter was addressing the “health and wealth gospel” of the ancient world. This false gospel of that day taught that if you want to have good crops and be prosperous you need to worship the idols and false gods of the day.

Peter alludes to it again later in 2 Pet. 2:13-14 when he writes, “those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime,” “carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,” “having eyes full of adultery,” and “a heart trained in covetous practices.” Also this was what Balaam told Israel’s enemies to do to Israel to try to get God to turn against Israel (Num. 31:6).

Peter’s point is that there were false teachers in his day. We also have false teachers today. I need to know God’s word so well that I can discern between the truth that God wants me to know and the false ideas that are so frequently taught. I pray that God would teach me His word through His gifted teachers so that I can discern the truth that God wants me to know.



**Bullock’s Oriole, Hebbroville, Texas**

2 Pet. 2:4-9. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds) — *then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

Who are the “angels who sinned”? This sounds like the demons or fallen angels that followed Satan’s rebellion against God. But these fallen angels have been continually active in the world, even to this day. In the context Peter moves from these “angels who sinned” to Noah. I take it that these “angels who sinned” are the “sons of god” of Gen. 6:2, who somehow “took wives of all whom they chose” from “the daughters of men.” Peter tells us that these fallen angels of Gen. 6 have been locked up in “chains of darkness.”

Jude 6 says “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” Where are the “chains of darkness”? Most Bible translations read “hell.” The Greek word is “Tartarus.”

God stuck these “angels who sinned” in their own special lock-up until He gets ready to deal with them along with Satan and the rest of the fallen angels we call demons. Then they all (Satan, demons, and the “sons of God of Gen. 6) will be cast into the “Lake of Fire” of Rev. 20:10.

Peter is talking about judgment and discipline as examples of how God will deal with the false teachers of 2 Pet. 2:1-3. The “angels who sinned” are locked up in Tartarus. The unbelieving world of Noah’s day was destroyed by the flood that covered the whole earth, bringing in a major climate change reset.

The cities Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to ashes by fire coming down from heaven. This destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah foreshadows what will happen to all unbelievers who do not possess the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. They will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Then Peter comes to Lot calling him “righteous.” When I read Gen. 19:18, I don’t see Lot as a paragon of righteous virtue. Consider Lot’s daughters? Why did Lot stick around in that place where his soul was tormented “from day to day?” God’s angels finally had to drag Lot and his doubting wife (thomasina?) out of there.

Peter’s conclusion: “then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations.” We think of “temptation” in the sense of temptation to sin. 1 Cor. 10:13 is a favorite memory verse, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

But the word translated “temptation” as found in the Bible includes all kinds of trials and tests. 1 Pet. 2:9 uses it in the same sense that it is used in Rev. 3:10, “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.” The word “trial” is the same word for “temptations.” So God will remove all believers from the earth when Jesus returns at the Rapture, followed by the seven year Tribulation. Peter tells us that until this time “the Lord knows how ... to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”



2 Pet. 2:10-14. and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, *and* will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have* a heart trained in covetous practices, *and are* accursed children.

Today’s passage begins in the middle of the sentence. 2 Pet. 2:9 ended: “to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” The sentence continues here: “and especially those who walk according to the flesh.” The false teachers Peter is discussing in Chapter 2 are motivated and driven by the “lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16).

Peter lists some of their sins: (1) In 2 Pet. 2:1, they “deny the Lord who bought them.” Were they denying that Jesus was God? Were they saying that Jesus’ death on the cross was not all that was required for our salvation? Did they deny Jesus’ resurrection?

(2) In 2 Pet. 2:2 they coveted and deceived others with false teaching.

(3) Now in 2 Pet. 2:10, “They are presumptuous, self-willed.” They make their own rules about what they do and how they live.

(4) “They speak evil of dignitaries.” The word “dignitaries” is rendered in other translations as “glorious ones,” “angelic majesties,” and “celestial beings.” Peter compares this speaking evil by the false teachers with the angels who “do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.”

(5) They carouse in the daytime” and commit “adultery.” They deceive immature believers in the church. And again they are covetous. They do this while they feast with believers in the church.

This latter accusation reminds me of Paul’s warning in 1 Cor. 11:23-34. They were turning the Lord’s supper into a bacchanalian orgy. So what is going on? They are obviously guilty of a whole bunch of sins. We read them and think. “Well that is what they were doing and teaching, but I know better. I don’t do those things.” Yes, we should not commit these sins. But what these false teachers were doing and teaching was what they and others in the church had grown up doing from childhood. These sins were taught by the idol worshipers of the predominant fertility cults of the ancient world as the way to achieve prosperity; and hence Peter’s condemnation of the false teachers’ covetousness.

False teachers today are not so brazen as to teach these things. But did God create this world out of nothing 6,000 to 8,000 years ago? Or did it happen by a “big bang” 13 to 14 billion years ago? Did He create man on the sixth day or did man evolve from some monkey? Did he create us male and female, but if you think you are something else then do it? Will God destroy this world by fire sometime in the future or will He let us destroy ourselves by climate change? Is your god a sovereign god who arbitrarily chose some select people to be saved and left the rest in just condemnation, or is your God a God of love, justice, omnipotence, omniscience, who also happens to be sovereign and let’s each one of us choose whether we will believe or not believe? All these and more are ideas circulating throughout the world and are being taught in our churches. I worship the true God and He has told me who He is in His word.

2 Pet. 2:20-22. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

There does not seem to be a general agreement among Bible teachers as to whom these verses are referring. One position is easy to reject. That is, that these are believers who are in danger of losing their salvation. If God gives eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ, then that salvation is a gift from God that cannot be lost. To think that a person can lose their salvation is to make our eternal salvation a matter of works. Some people think that these verses refer to the false teachers who are the focus of this chapter and that they are unsaved. Others say that these are believers who are misled by the false teachers. There are excellent Bible teachers on both sides that hold that these are unbelieving false teachers or believers who have been led astray by the false teachers.

From the context, 2 Pet. 2:18 reads “the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.” Other translations read, “those who are barely escaping (or just escaped) ...” Whether they “barely escaped or actually escaped, it sounds like they did escape. I take it, these are believers.

2 Pet. 2:20 begins with the word “if ...” In English the word “if” means maybe they did and maybe they didn’t. But the Greek structure suggests that they have escaped.

Then there is the word “knowledge” in verse 20. This is not the common Greek word for knowledge, but one that is sometimes translated or interpreted as “complete knowledge” or “full knowledge.” These people, whoever they are, knew more than just the bare facts about Jesus Christ. Again, it sounds to me like they were believers.

When Peter repeated the word “escaped” from verse 18 again in verse 20, he is telling us that the people about whom he wrote in verse 20 are the same people of whom he wrote in verse 18. Verse 18 does not refer to the false teachers, but to the victims of the false teachers who have been misled by the false teachers.

In verse 20 Peter says these people have “escaped the pollutions of the world.” Some Bible teachers say that these are not new believers but those who have grown in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and have reached a level of spiritual maturity. Then the false teachers come along with “great swelling words of emptiness” (as it says in verse 18) and what is the result? “They are again entangled in them (in “the pollutions of the world”) and that “latter end is worse for them than the beginning.” This worse “latter end” can mean that when I am led astray by false teachers, I can find myself falling into sin. I can face divine discipline in this life, as well as the potential loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

I praise God for the faithful pastors and Bible teachers God has given me throughout my life. I pray that the Holy Spirit would guide my understanding of God’s word. I would like to hear Jesus’ commendation at the Judgment Seat of Christ, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”



**Black-throated Sparrow, near Hebbroville, Texas**

2 Pet. 3:1-4. Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both* of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation."

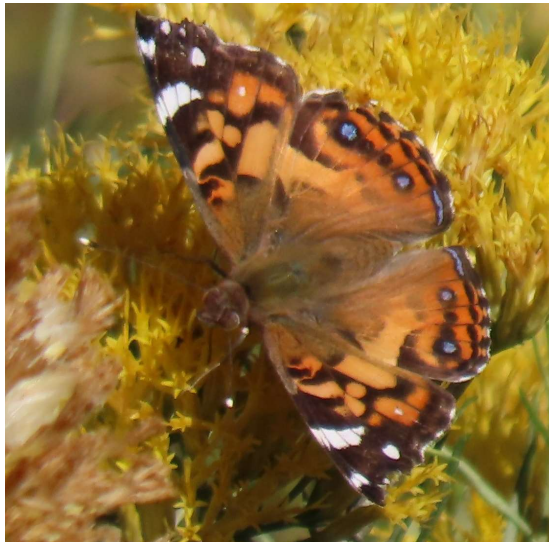
Peter is still dealing with the issue of false teachers. But he has moved forward from false teaching regarding the work of Jesus Christ, salvation, idolatry and an immoral lifestyle, to the subject of prophecy. This is particularly pertinent today where the majority of seminaries, theologians, preachers and church denominations have false views of prophecy.

"I stir up your pure (sincere) minds by way of reminder." Peter is complimenting his readers. They have not yet bought into the messages of the false teachers of chapter 2. They had grown up in the idolatry and sexual immorality of the fertility cults of the ancient world. So Peter reminded them not to be deceived by these false teachers. But now in chapter 3 he warns his readers (and us) about false teachers that abound today and distort prophecy.

"Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts." The false teachers of chapter 2 were motivated by lust and covetousness. The same is true of these "scoffers" in chapter 3. Today the false teachers of prophecy run the gamut from those who totally ignore biblical prophecy to the sensationalists who turn present events into the fulfillment of prophecy.

"All things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." This is the thinking of the world. The laws of nature are the only god the world knows. The thinking of the world is that miracles do not exist and never happened. Jesus' resurrection is a myth. "There never was a worldwide flood." The world says, "Once upon a time there was a big bang ..." and this happened 13-14 billion years ago. Gen. 1:1 tells us "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." When? Six to eight thousand years ago. As much as the world tries to create world peace using the United Nations, or Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, or the future ideas of Islam, the words of Jesus in Matt. 24:6 ring true, "wars and rumors of wars" remain with us.

"Where is the promise of His coming?" The New Testament teaches us that the next prophetic event to occur is the return of Jesus Christ. All believers are "to be caught up ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ..." (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The Bible tells us to expect this to happen at any time. We see this confident expectation throughout the epistles of the New Testament. But do I still have the same confident expectation that Jesus could return even today? If I did, would I do the things that I do every day.



**American Lady, butterfly, Fort Collins, Colorado**

2 Pet. 3:5-7. For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

“For this they willfully forget.” Peter is referring to the scoffers he mentions in 2 Pet. 3:3 who deny that Jesus is coming again. “Willfully forget.” Different translations render these two words as “deliberately overlook,” “deliberately suppress,” or “deliberately forget.” When you deny one part of Scripture what happens? You start to doubt other parts. This reminds me of the warning of Heb. 2:1. “Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” When I buy into one false idea of Scripture, I start to build a whole house of cards that leads me away from God.

God’s word tells us about Creation and the Flood. The evidence for the Flood is also written in the rocks and geology of the world. But the scoffers ignore both the written word of God and the evidence God has provided under our feet. Scientists today date the sedimentary layers of rock by the fossils that are in them. Sedimentary layers of rock were formed as the dirt and sand in water is laid down in layers. For fossils to form, the plants and animals must be buried quickly before they can rot or be eaten by scavengers. Our evolutionary scientists date the fossils by the rock layers in which they are found assigning eons of time for each layer. This is circular reasoning: The sedimentary rock layers are dated by the fossils found in them and the fossils are dated by the sedimentary layers in which they are found.

But Gen. 1 tells us, “Then God said ...” God spoke during each of the six days of Creation giving us this world in which we live. Then God also brought the worldwide Flood destroying unbelieving mankind and all animal life except what was preserved in Noah’s ark. Dr. Constable’s *Notes* makes an interesting comment that is lost in our English translations. In 2 Pet. 3:5 Peter tells us that “by the word of God ...,” and then mentions the waters of the Flood. 2 Pet. 3:6, continuing the same sentence, begins “by which.” “Which” is plural in the Greek referring to both the word of God and to the waters of the Flood. So God spoke and the Flood came.

“The heavens and earth which are now preserved by the same word, ...” God created the world by speaking. The world continues to exist by God’s word until God says otherwise. God is a God of truth. What He has said, He will do. Jesus promised that He would return again. He will return and this could happen at any moment, even today.

Peter also adds in 2 Pet. 3:6 an Old Testament prophecy, “the heavens and earth ... are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (Isa. 66:15-16, Mal. 4:1). When God created mankind, He made us responsible for maintaining and cultivating this world. This is where we live. God expects us to take care of His creation. With wisdom and skill we are to use the knowledge and tools God has given us to do this. This world will not be destroyed by global warming or by climate change because of mankind’s actions. Peter tells us that the world will be destroyed by fire before the time of the “judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (Rev. 20:16-20), God will say the word and destroy this world by fire. Then John saw in his vision of Rev. 21:1 “the new heaven and new earth” where we will spend all eternity.



**Golden-crowned Kinglet, near Port Lavaca, Texas**

2 Pet. 3:8-10. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

“With the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Peter is still answering the scoffers of 2 Pet. 3:3 who deny the return of Jesus Christ because this promise was made long ago and it has not happened. God is not bound by time as we are. He is omnipresent, meaning that not only is He at every place and with every person, but He is there also at every time. Peter is also picking up on an Old Testament verse, Psa. 90:4, “For a thousand years in Your sight, are like yesterday when it is past.”

Some people look at this comparison between a thousand years and a day and say that the six references in Rev. 20:2-6 to the one thousand year Millennium are not literal. But the language Peter uses here makes clear that Peter is using a figure of speech as does the Psa. 90 reference. But Rev. 20 does not use either “as” or “like,” but speaks of a literal one thousand years. Peter also gives a reason why God has delayed the return of Jesus Christ. He is allowing more time for every person to change his mind about Jesus Christ, using Jerome’s poor translation of the Greek word for “change your mind” in the Latin *Vulgate*, calling it “repentance.”

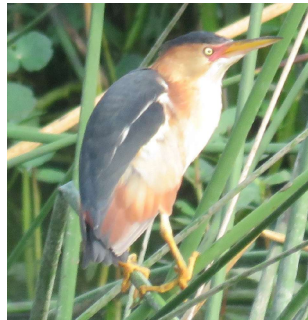
Bible teachers have multiple opinions about when and how long the day of the Lord is. The term is frequently used in the Old Testament and also appears in the New Testament. I will leave it simply as a reference to future unfulfilled prophecy that will happen at the Rapture or afterwards. “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.”

When Jesus Christ returns for believers and we are caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, these scoffers certainly will be caught by surprise. I don’t want to be caught by surprise. If I think that Jesus Christ will return in the next two minutes, am I going to submit to the “lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16)? Paul phrased it well in 1 Thess. 5:6, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (clear thinking based on the word of God). Unbelievers, as well as scoffing believers with mis-guided ideas about the future (prophecies) by God, will be surprised.

Then Peter adds “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” When will God’s Aggie bonfire occur? (Pardon my malapropism.) Again good Bible teachers are divided about the timing. But I think Peter tells us in 2 Pet. 3:7 when he wrote, “the heavens and the earth ,..., are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

This sounds like an event that occurs contemporaneously with the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15.

No one has all the answers. That is why I need to continue to read God’s word, pray and then do what it says. Also, I need to be careful that when I don’t fully understand what the Bible says, that I don’t come up with some new contortion of what I think the Bible may be saying. The written word of God has been around for 3,500 years. As Solomon said in Eccl. 1:9, “There is nothing new under the sun.”



**Least Bittern, Cattail Marsh, Beaumont, Texas**

**APPENDIX**  
**Verses in the Gospel of John with the word "BELIEVE"**

Several times in these devotionals, I refer to the 100 times John uses the word "believe" in his gospel. He give no other requirement for ap erson to receive the gift of the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life. Many times I have heard preachers say that John uses the word "believe between 90 and 100 times. Here is the way I confirmed the 100 times Johnuses the word.

1. John 1:7. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might **believe**.
2. John 1:12. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who **believe** in His name:
3. John 1:50. Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you **believe**? You will see greater things than these."
4. John 2:11. This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples **believed** in Him.
5. John 2:22. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they **believed** the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.
6. John 2:23. Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many **believed** in His name when they saw the signs which He did.
- 7 & 8. John 3:12. "If I have told you earthly things and you do not **believe**, how will you **believe** if I tell you heavenly **things**?"
9. John 3:15. "that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
10. John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
- 11, 12 & 13. John 3:18. "He who **believes** in Him is not condemned; but he who does not **believe** is condemned already, because he has not **believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- 14 & 15. John 3:36. "He who **believes** in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not **believe** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
16. John 4:21. Jesus said to her, "Woman, **believe** Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.
17. John 4:39. And many of the Samaritans of that city **believed** in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I *ever* did."
18. John 4:41. And many more **believed** because of His own word.
19. John 4:42. Then they said to the woman, "Now we **believe**, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."
20. John 4:48. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means **believe**."
21. John 4:50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man **believed** the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

22. John 4:53. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself **believed**, and his whole household.
23. John 5:24. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and **believes** in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
24. John 5:38. "But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not **believe**."
25. John 5:44. "But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not **believe**."
26. John 5:46. "For if you believed Moses, you would **believe** Me; for he wrote about Me."
- 27 & 28. John 5:47. "But if you do not **believe** his writings, how will you **believe** My words?"
29. John 6:29. Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent."
30. John 6:30. Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and **believe** You? What work will You do?"
31. John 6:35. And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who **believes** in Me shall never thirst."
32. John 6:36. "But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not **believe**."
33. John 6:40. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and **believes** in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."
34. John 6:45. "But because I tell the truth, you do not **believe** Me."
35. John 6:47. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who **believes** in Me has everlasting life."
- 36 & 37. John 6:64. "But there are some of you who do not **believe**." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not **believe**, and who would betray Him."
38. John 6:69. "Also we have come to **believe** and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
39. John 7:5. For even His brothers did not **believe** in Him."
40. John 7:31. And many of the people **believed** in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?"
41. John 7:38. "He who **believes** in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."
42. John 7:39. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those **believing** in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."
43. John 7:48. "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees **believed** in Him?"
44. John 8:24. "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not **believe** that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."
45. John 8:30. As He spoke these words, many **believed** in Him."
46. John 8:31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who **believed** Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."
47. John 8:45. "But because I tell the truth, you do not **believe** Me."
48. John 8:46. "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not **believe** Me?"

49. John 9:18. But the Jews did not **believe** concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight.
50. John 9:35. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you **believe** in the Son of God?"
51. John 9:36. He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may **believe** in Him?"
53. John 9:38. Then he said, "Lord, I **believe!**" And he worshiped Him.
53. John 10:25. Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not **believe**. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.
54. John 10:26. "But you do not **believe**, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.
55. John 10:37. "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not **believe** Me;
- 56, 57 & 58. John 10:38. "but if I do, though you do not **believe** Me, **believe** the works, that you may know and **believe** that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."
59. John 10:42. And many **believed** in Him there.
60. John 11:15. "But because I tell the truth, you do not **believe** Me.
61. John 11:25. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who **believes** in Me, though he may die, he shall live.
- 62 & 63. John 11:26. "And whoever lives and **believes** in Me shall never die. Do you **believe** this?"
64. John 11:27. She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I **believe** that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."
65. John 11:40. Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would **believe** you would see the glory of God?"
66. John 11:42. "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may **believe** that You sent Me."
67. John 11:45. Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, **believed** in Him.
68. John 11:48. "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will **believe** in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."
69. John 12:11. because on account of him many of the Jews went away and **believed** in Jesus.
70. John 12:36. "While you have the light, **believe** in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.
71. John 12:37. But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not **believe** in Him,
72. John 12:38. that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has **believed** our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"
73. John 12:39. Therefore they could not **believe**, because Isaiah said again:
74. John 12:42. Nevertheless even among the rulers many **believed** in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;
- 75 & 76. John 12:44. Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who **believes** in Me, **believes** not in Me but in Him who sent Me.



77. John 12:46. "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever **believes** in Me should not abide in darkness.
78. John 12:47. "And if anyone hears My words and does not **believe**, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.
79. John 13:19. "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*.
80. John 14:1. "Let not your heart be troubled; you **believe** in God, believe also in Me.
81. John 14:10. "Do you not **believe** that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.
- 82 & 83. John 14:11. "**Believe** Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else **believe** Me for the sake of the works themselves.
84. John 14:12. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who **believes** in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father.
85. John 14:29. "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.
86. John 16:9. "of sin, because they do not **believe** in Me;
87. John 16:27. "for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have **believed** that I came forth from God.
88. John 16:30. "Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we **believe** that You came forth from God."
89. John 16:31. Jesus answered them, "Do you now **believe**?"
90. John 17:8. "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have **believed** that You sent Me.
91. John 17:20. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will **believe** in Me through their word;
92. John 17:21. "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may **believe** that You sent Me.
93. John 19:35. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.
94. John 20:8. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.
95. John 20:25. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not **believe**."
- 96 & 97. John 20:27. Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be **unbelieving**, but **believing**."
98. John 20:29. Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have **believed**."
- 99 & 100. John 20:31. but these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that **believing** you may have life in His name.

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