

365
Amazing Answers
TO BIG BIBLE
QUESTIONS
A DAILY
DEVOTIONAL

PRESENTED TO

BY

DATE

365

Amazing Answers

TO **BIG BIBLE**

QUESTIONS

 A DAILY
DEVOTIONAL 

WITH
DOUG BATCHELOR

365 Amazing Answers to Big Bible Questions: A Daily Devotional
Pastor Doug Batchelor

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How to Use This Devotional

This daily devotional is designed to inform and inspire you with a wide variety of interesting and thought-provoking Bible questions each month. Some questions and answers might seem similar to others you've already encountered, but each entry approaches each subject from a unique reference point—such as a different Scripture. However, in some cases, we have divided questions into different parts and have grouped these days together for ease of use.

At the end of this devotional, you'll find an index to the main Scripture references for each entry, so you'll be able to use this resource as a Bible study reference tool for a long time to come.

Also, if you have any concerns about a specific entry, including a misprint or wrong Scripture reference, we'd like to hear from you. When you contact us, please email editor@amazingfacts.org and put "Devotional Correction" in the subject line. Thank you!

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Finally, remember to pray and ask for God's Holy Spirit as you study His Word each day and seek to discover His will for your life. Enjoy, and God bless you!

Introduction

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Matthew 13:44



In February 2014, a married couple in Northern California decided to hike a trail on their property that they'd been on many times before. But this time, the two happened to notice the edge of an old, rusty can, covered in moss, sticking out from the dirt.

After poking at the can and digging around it, they found five additional cans that had obviously been stashed there for a very long time. Naturally curious, they managed to pry open the rusty containers. As you might imagine, they were utterly shocked to find a treasure trove of 1,427 gold coins dated from 1847 to 1894. The coins had never been circulated and were in pristine condition—and worth a total of \$10 million! The couple said they planned to share their good fortune and use their sudden wealth to support their favorite charities.

I believe that, in the long run, finding an answer to your deepest questions is even more satisfying than finding a lost treasure. Psalm 19:10 says that the words of God are “more to be desired . . . than gold.” And why not? Gold doesn't last—but what God promises in His Word does.

That's why I'm glad you picked up this unique book—or received it as a gift. In a concise and direct style, this new devotional covers some of the most frequently asked and thought-provoking Bible questions that have come in over the past 18 years during my *Bible Answers Live* radio program. Even after you go through these 365 answers this year, I trust you'll find this to be a valuable resource in your Bible study library for years to come—or maybe you can share the blessings of knowledge with someone else after you finish reading it.

From Christian lifestyle to Bible history to prophecy, each day's Bible answer is designed to bring you closer to Jesus and will help you better understand God. Of course, my ultimate hope is that this small devotional makes an even bigger impact than just giving you concise Bible answers—I hope it inspires you to feast on the Word of God for yourself in search of more life-changing answers. I don't think there is anything more satisfying in this world than a prayerful, successful search through Scripture.

“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). So may God bless you as you hunt for treasures of truth found all throughout His Word!

Pastor Doug Batchelor
President, Amazing Facts



How much do we actually benefit from keeping Jesus' principles and commands?



"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray" (Proverbs 10:17).

Every advice, principle, and command of Jesus provides a person with outstanding blessings! The biggest lottery winner in history pales in comparison to God's rich blessings to His obedient children.

Here are just a few benefits that come from following Jesus' rules: Jesus as a personal friend; freedom from guilt and fear; peace of mind; indescribable happiness; better health and a longer life; no hangovers; assurance of a home in heaven!

Jesus compared the people who are obedient to His words to someone building on a strong foundation. He said, "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock" (Luke 6:47, 48). It's not enough to just hear His words and agree with them; we need to take action and do as He has asked. We need to live His commands.

Besides those benefits listed above, He promises: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5); "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3); and "I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

Jesus tells us, "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). And what could top this promise? "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7). In following Jesus, we are adopted into His family. As children of God, we become heirs of everything—the entire universe!

Talk about riches! The true Christian receives benefits from his heavenly Father that even the richest people on Earth can never purchase.



Precious Savior, thank you for your words of instruction that show me the way of genuine love and the path to everlasting life!



For Further Study: Matthew 5:19; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3–5



When we come to Christ, does He really forgive all our sins—even future ones?

*“If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”
(Hebrews 10:26).*



When we accept Jesus into our lives, He promises to wash away all of our sins. His grace is absolutely sufficient, and you can be assured that His atonement covers every single wrong you’ve ever committed—so long, of course, as your repentance is genuine (Romans 3:25).

Yet some teach that by making just one confession at one moment in our lives, Jesus also forgives all future sins. It is the belief that if a person repents that one time, they are forever secure in their salvation and that nothing can change that—a teaching called “once saved, always saved.” However, I don’t believe the Bible supports this view. While we can always be assured of God’s undying love toward us, we have the freedom to turn away.

Our text in Hebrews affirms that we must guard against the idea that we can willfully sin after receiving knowledge of God’s truth. The problem here is not with the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ; the problem is with our choosing to turn away from what we know is true. If the Lord removed our choice once we came to Him, we would become like robots, which are programmed to respond out of duty, not from a heart of devotion, trust, and love.

Another way to think about God’s grace is like a bank account. If we sin, we may come to our heavenly Father and, through Jesus’ sacrifice, confess and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). There are sufficient funds in God’s bank account to cover all our sins. By faith, we receive these funds through repentance and confession. But we don’t get to make early withdrawals on sins, especially if we plan on committing them!

If a Christian believes that repentance happens just once, there is little need to grow in character and work to become more like Jesus. Such thinking ignores a vital Bible teaching that encourages us to strive—to run the race—to receive the prize of everlasting life.



*Lord, help me know today that your grace is
sufficient to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.
Help me also to strive for holiness that I might
grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus.*





What are the basic steps to becoming a Christian?



"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

The most important step in giving your life to God is to realize how much He loves you. The Lord wants everyone to be saved. God isn't trying to keep people out of heaven. In fact, Jesus came and gave His life for us so that we might receive salvation. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:3–5).

We must next admit that we are sinners and lost without Jesus. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

We then repent of our sins. We acknowledge them and turn from them. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Then believe God has forgiven you. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His graces" (Ephesians 1:7).

Accept God's free gift of salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Since you now are a child of God, the Lord will begin to work in your life in amazing ways. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).



*Dear Jesus, I acknowledge my need of you.
Please forgive me and come live in my life.
I accept you as my personal Savior.*



For Further Study: 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 5:11–13

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Is the holy city really big enough to hold all the saved people of all ages?

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 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”
(John 14:2, 3).



First, let’s get a little perspective on the size of New Jerusalem. The Bible says, “The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal” (Revelation 21:16). The city is perfectly square. Its perimeter is 12,000 furlongs, or 1,500 miles (a furlong is 1/8 mile). It is 375 miles long on each side. That equals more than 140,000 square miles, a little bigger than the state of New Mexico!

If the city were to be crowded and each saved person given only 100 square feet of ground space, there would be room for 39 billion people in the city, which is many times larger than the present population of the world. Many statisticians believe that if all the people who have ever lived were saved, there would be plenty of room for them in the city. The Scriptures make it clear, however, that only a few will be saved (Matthew 7:14). So there will be more than enough room in the great city.

When Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them, they were troubled. To comfort them, Christ explained that He would be going to His Father’s house where there are “many rooms.” In addition, He assured them that He was going “to prepare a place” for each of them. It reminds me of kids going to visit their grandparents on a big farm out in the country. The old home is large and has plenty of space for everyone.

The heavenly Father has plenty of room in His place for each of His children. The Creator of the universe is not limited on space. His love knows no bounds!



Dear Father in heaven, how I look forward to my home with you and the entire heavenly host.



For Further Study: Ecclesiastes 5:10; Luke 16:13; 1 Timothy 6:10

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What are some tips on how to handle temptation?



“A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (Proverbs 22:3).

There are many suggestions in the Bible for dealing with temptation, but the most important tip is this: Run! Few speed records are broken when people run from temptation. They often crawl away from it hoping it catches up with them. Sometimes temptation comes through a door we deliberately leave open.

Suppose that you accidentally spilled kerosene all over your clothes and somebody nearby lit a match. Where would you go? As far away as you could and as fast as possible! That should be the attitude of a Christian toward temptation. Paul said, “Flee sexual immorality” and “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14). So run away from sin, and don’t leave a forwarding address.

Don’t miss this: When you run from temptation, you head toward God. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). When you know something is sinful, don’t engage or banter with the devil, because he is the master of rationalization—that’s how Eve fell!

It breaks my heart when Christians try to justify their sins. There is no limit to the arguments with which the devil can supply you. As soon as you know something is wrong, flee! The bravest person runs from temptation; the fool flirts with it.

The most precious way to overcome any temptation has to be because you love God. You know that sin hurts God, and when tempted you need to say out loud, “I can’t do that because I love God.” The more you love Jesus, the less the attractions of the devil will hold sway over you.

We’re all tempted, but the Lord has promised that we can be overcomers through the “exceeding great and precious promises” found in the Scriptures. Jesus will teach us how to overcome. The devil could not make Jesus sin, nor can he make us. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). Ask Him for overcoming power and joyfully dive into the pages of His Word!



Dear Lord, when I’m tempted, may my first thought be to run to you, my only sure help.



For Further Study: Psalm 119:11; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Hebrews 4:15

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



How could a loving God order men, women, and children to be killed?

*“The Lord is ... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”
(2 Peter 3:9).*



Many honest, sincere souls have a difficult time accepting those few Bible passages in which God commands the Israelites to wipe out whole nations—men, women, and children. They see a dichotomy between the picture of Jesus in the New Testament and what appears to be a vengeful Old Testament God ordering genocide.

First, let me say that we should all find it difficult to read stories of people being destroyed in the Bible. It's not meant to be happy reading. Notice what Scripture says: “As I live,” says the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11). Actually, some of the most grace-filled statements in the Bible are found in the Old Testament—and some of the most severe judgments are spoken of in the New Testament (see Revelation 16).

In the time of Israel, God's people often encountered those who had a simple agenda, “Kill or be killed.” One such group was the Amalekites. This treacherous people were bent on Israel's destruction, attacking God's people from behind after they came out of Egypt, targeting the elderly and weakest. They also practiced some of the most abominable rituals with animals, which are not worth repeating here. Some scholars indicate that these practices led them to become an incredibly diseased people. In order to preserve His people, the Lord told Israel to bring complete judgment upon this nation.

God was and is longsuffering. Not only did He give nations the opportunity to repent, but Israel was to accept any stranger who wanted to join the people of God. The picture of a vengeful God who delights in randomly wiping out people is a distorted view given to us by skeptics ready to blame God for everything. Bringing righteous judgment against evil is actually a demonstration of God's love.



Dear Lord, thank you for being patient and giving every person a chance to accept you. May I join with others who will one day say, “Just and true are Your ways.”





How do I fully surrender my life to God?



"From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

This is the most important question we can ask: How can I know I'm a genuine Christian? How can I know that I'm totally surrendered to God and that I've said, "Lord, my life is yours"?

Our text above indicates that in order to find God's will, we need to be looking for Him with everything we've got. This implies complete sincerity. It means that we have gone beyond recognizing our need of God and have put our full effort into seeking Him through His Word and through prayer.

God has given us the power to choose. He won't force His ways on us, but He invites us to "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). The first thing to do is to choose to serve God.

We can then pray, "Lord, I'm willing to follow you." But if you're not sure you're willing but you want to be, you can even pray, "Lord, make me willing to be willing."

What about those times we do things we know we shouldn't? Paul describes this struggle in Romans 7:15: "What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." How do we overcome this cycle of sin and get victory over the flesh? Paul says, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (verse 25). God promises to do that for us by faith in Jesus. We need to yield our will to Christ. Continue to pray and tell God, "I'm willing for you to work in my life and do whatever you need to do."

Finally, don't get discouraged. Remember that surrendering your life to God is not a one-time event; it must be a daily commitment. The apostles followed Jesus for three-and-a-half years before they were fully converted. Our progress happens over time as we trust in Him and stay committed to Him. So it's important to renew that allegiance every day.



Lord, I long to be totally surrendered to you because I know that's the only way to have life. Help me to know what it means to be emptied so that I can be filled by your Spirit.



For Further Study: Mark 8:34; Mark 12:30; Romans 10:9–13

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What happens to a person's "spirit" when he or she dies?

"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).



I often see a lot of confusion on this topic. Some believe that when we die, our physical bodies "sleep" until God raises us in our glorified immortal bodies. But what about our "spirit," as seen in Ecclesiastes 12? Where does it go after death? Well, Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, says it goes back to God.

Some believe this spirit to be a separate entity that can think and act on its own. But the Word of God describes it very differently. This power, this "breath of life," which was breathed into Adam at the creation, is not any more conscious than electricity. Notice, "The dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6).

Consider that in Luke, Jesus describes Jarius' daughter as "sleeping" before He raises her from the dead. He also says this about Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (John 11:11). Jesus understood death to be like a peaceful, dreamless sleep without consciousness of time.

It's also interesting to note that of the 12 or so resurrections mentioned in the Bible, not one of those raised is ever recorded commenting on being aware of anything after death.

Of course, the next thing a believer will be aware of after death is the resurrection. That's why Paul says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). Adam died about 6,000 years ago, but as far as he's concerned, he's going to come up with a new body instantly. Imagine that!



Dear Jesus, thank you for the hope of the resurrection and the assurance that you hold the keys to the tomb.



For Further Study: Genesis 2:7; Psalm 115:17; Job 27:3

Scan for more on this topic. ►





What does it mean that Christ preached to “spirits” that were in prison?



“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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:18–20).

This passage has certainly confused many people. Some say it means Christ literally descended into the depths of the earth and preached to lost souls living in limbo. But this is far from the text’s real message and gives a dangerous, faulty impression that a person can somehow still be saved after having died lost.

First, notice *how* Christ preached to those spirits. He did it “by the Spirit,” referring to the Holy Spirit. So whatever Christ did in preaching at this time, He did it through the Holy Spirit.

When was the preaching done? “When once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.” So the preaching was actually done while the ark was being built—when Noah warned the world before the flood.

Finally, *to whom* was the preaching done? “To the spirits in prison.” Throughout the Bible, we find this terminology used to describe those who are bound in the prison house of sin. David prayed, “Bring my soul out of prison” (Psalm 142:7). The mission of Jesus was “to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Isaiah 61:1).

Peter here is simply telling us that it was the Spirit of Christ that preached through Noah in the days before the flood. Jesus was there, through the Holy Spirit, to speak conviction to hearts and appeal to the lost to come into the ark.

The question for you, friend, is this: “Are you a captive in Satan’s prison of sin?” Jesus, through the call of the Holy Spirit to your heart, is inviting you to receive salvation so that you can be set free.



*Dear Jesus, I ask you to speak to my heart
and break the chains that bind me to sin.
Touch my life, through Your Holy Spirit,
and free me to live for you today.*



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 14:32; Hebrews 12:23; 1 John 4:1



How can I share the truth about God with my friends?

“A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).



First, let's discuss what we shouldn't do when sharing our faith: *argue*. People don't respond well to argument. When hearts are proud or stubborn, we dig in and fight—no matter what creative, logical arguments are presented. So don't preach *at* people and don't be arrogant. Remember, you were once in their position (see Ephesians 2:13).

There are three specific things we can do to share God with those we care about:

Be a true friend and listen. Then, if they are open to it, share information. The Bible says, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6). It's a good idea to pray, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you know when to speak and what to say. Share with your friends what God has done for you personally. How has a relationship with Him changed your life for the better? That can make a real impact in someone's thinking. Sometimes sharing a book or a DVD works well, especially with people who are argumentative.

Be a good example. You don't want to be un-Christ-like and get angry at your friends if they disagree with you. That's not the way Jesus would win them over. But you can set an example in the way that you live. If love is your motivation in life, people will notice. “In all things [show] yourself to be a pattern of good works; . . . [use] sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Titus 2:6–8).

Pray for your friends, consistently and patiently. Remember, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). We can't see things the way God does, and sometimes it takes months or years for Him to reach those we love. Trust that He wants to save your friends even more than you do. Don't give up. Keep on praying.



Dear God, I want to help my friends know you and your salvation. Guide me by your Holy Spirit to know what to say and when to share. May my words always be full of encouragement and truth.





If I accept Christ and His forgiveness and then fall again, will He forgive me again?



"A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16).

The disciple Peter once approached Christ and asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). Some believe the rabbis of his day taught forgiving others three times was sufficient and that Peter was seeking to be generous in how he asked Jesus the question. Christ's response must have caught him off guard: "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (v. 22).

Most of us would lose count if we tried to remember to forgive people that many times—which is the point of Christ's message. The idea of legalistically trying to count the number of times you should forgive a person takes away the heart of forgiveness. The apostle Paul taught, "Love suffers long" (1 Corinthians 13:4). True forgiveness doesn't keep a tally of offenses.

To illustrate how longsuffering we should be toward others, Jesus tells Peter a story about a servant who was forgiven an enormous debt, but who then turned around and would not forgive someone else a small debt. His master heard what happened and said, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" (Matthew 18:32, 33).

The point is clear: We should be just as compassionate toward others who fail as God is toward us. The way we relate to others is based on how God treats us. If Jesus says we should be willing to forgive people who have fallen so many times that we cannot even keep track, is the heavenly Father any less compassionate when we fail?

The Bible teaches, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God doesn't put a number on this promise. If we humbly come to Him and genuinely repent, we can know that He hears us and forgives us.



Dear God, your mercies toward me are more numerous than the stars of heaven. Thank you.



For Further Study: Luke 15:20; Exodus 34:7



Where is the Ark of the Covenant located today?

“There I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony” (Exodus 25:22).



After the Exodus, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle where He would dwell among His people. The tabernacle structure was designed around a sacred centerpiece called the Ark of the Covenant, a rectangular chest set with two statues of angels looking down on top of it, a place called the mercy seat. This ark was placed within the temple's second compartment, the “holy of holies.”

Later, King David had the ark transferred to Jerusalem, and Solomon, his son, placed it in the midst of a spectacular temple he had built. Originally, the ark only contained the two stone tablets of the Decalogue. Later, Aaron's rod and a small pot of manna were also placed inside; the book of the law was put in the side of the ark (see Exodus 25:21; Deuteronomy 10:3, 5; and Exodus 16:33, 34).

The last time the ark is mentioned is in 2 Chronicles 35:3, during the reign of King Josiah. Naturally, many have wondered where this special chest now resides. Since the time Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, the Bible makes no mention of where the ark went. The Scriptures itemize many other vessels that were captured by the Babylonians, but the ark itself is clearly missing.

Based on 2 Maccabees 2:4–8, some believe the prophet Jeremiah was instructed by God to move the ark outside Jerusalem before the city was destroyed and to hide it in a cave on Mount Nebo. This seems unlikely because at this same time, the Babylonian king had Jerusalem completely surrounded. It is more reasonable to assume that Jeremiah, with the help of loyal priests, hid the golden ark in one of the many caves or tunnels that honeycomb the ancient city of Jerusalem. To this day, the ark's location remains one of archeology's greatest secrets.

But what really matters most is that the law of God is hidden within our hearts. Finding the ark will not matter if we do not have the law within.



Dear Father in heaven, I invite you to write your laws in my heart today. I hunger for your presence and desire to commune with you.





How can I really know truth?



*"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"
(John 8:32).*

When people ask me this question, they are typically not wondering about the latest scandal in the tabloids (which are mostly far-removed from truth). They are seeking answers to life's big questions and are looking to understand divine things.

The Bible is clear that the ultimate source of truth comes from God. The Scriptures explain this in more than one way. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is also a provider of truth. "It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6). So also God's Word, the Bible, is a foundation of truth: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

One of the principles for finding God's truth is that we must be earnest in our search. "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). We should also pray for God to guide us to truth. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Some people are not willing to give up cherished ideas when they are looking for truth. The Bible warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). We must be humble and open to truth. "Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27).

If you are studying a Bible passage that stumps you, pray for God to give you understanding, and then search other verses on the topic. Use a concordance and compare Scripture with Scripture. "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10).

Most of all, search the Scriptures and look for Jesus. It is through God's Word that we most clearly see the Source of all truth.



*Dear Jesus, please guide me into all truth
that I may know and love you more.*



For Further Study: Matthew 11:25; John 5:39; 7:17

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



How were the books of the Bible chosen?

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. ... O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever” (Psalm 12:6, 7).



The Bible is made up of 66 books, written by approximately 40 authors over a period of 1,500 years. The word “canon” means “measuring rod,” and it’s the word that describes the standard version of Scriptures we have today. The careful process of determining which books would make up the Christian Bible occurred in the early church.

The earliest indications of Old Testament canon come from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah during the Babylonian captivity (605–535 B.C.). But the process was probably not complete until sometime around 200 B.C. Deciding which books to include was done by senior priests based on general agreement that each book was authentic and divinely inspired.

The Old Testament is not greatly disputed and is generally the same for both Protestants and Jews. These writings are repeatedly affirmed and quoted at least 400 times in the New Testament by Jesus and others!

We know more about development of the New Testament. The majority of these 27 books were recognized as inspired within 50 years of the death of the apostle John. By careful, prayerful evaluation, the early church reviewed the best nominees to include. They began by choosing books that were endorsed by the apostles. For example, Peter recognized Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

The first New Testament “canon” was the Muratorian Canon, compiled in A.D. 170. It included everything but Hebrews, James, and 3 John. Then in A.D. 363, the Council of Laodicea affirmed all 27 books were to be read in the church. Later councils within the next 50 years also affirmed the same 27 books as authoritative.

The history of this process demonstrates that God’s hand was leading all along the way. The church recognized and received by faith documents that had the obvious mark of divine inspiration. An unbiased study of all the different pieces of literature from this time will affirm the clear mark of the true Word of God.



*Dear Lord, thank you for providing me
with the Bible, a light for my pathway and
a word of hope in our dark world.*



For Further Study: 2 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 24:35; John 17:17

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Is the battle of Armageddon only a spiritual idea?



"They gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16).

The word "Armageddon" is something of a mystery, appearing only in this verse and nowhere else in Greek literature. It likely refers to the many battles in Israel's history centering around the mountain of Megiddo. This is also the same location of Mt. Carmel, where Elijah had his famous showdown with the prophets of Baal.

Contrary to what most people believe, the battle of Armageddon is not a typical war between political powers—such as Russia, China, and Israel. Instead, it is the final battle between Christ and Satan and their respective followers.

The first phase of Armageddon is detailed in Revelation 12:17, when the dragon makes war with the woman: "The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God." The ultimate conclusion of this battle takes place at the end of the 1,000 years, when the devil rallies "Gog and Magog," a symbolic name for the enemies of God's people, to attack the holy city (Revelation 20:8).

I believe that Satan will, someday soon, impersonate Christ and encourage the world to worship the beast. Revelation reveals several ways in which he will deceive the world through false representations.

Bible writers warned about these deceptions. Jesus said, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive" (Matthew 24:24). The apostle Paul warned us many times not to be deceived (1 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:6). Such preparation for Armageddon, to stand firm in the face of deception, needs to take place within our hearts now, not when the final events are already in full swing.

Thoughts of Armageddon should really focus us on a relationship with the Savior. Tanks, guns, or a bunker stocked with food will not protect us. We need to be clothed in the armor of Jesus' righteousness. Then we will prevail even in the face of a death decree given to those who keep God's commandments.



Dear Lord, I choose to be on your side in the war between good and evil. I commit my heart to your care that I might be ready for the last battle.



For Further Study: Revelation 16:12; Joel 3:11, 12, 16; Revelation 12:11; Ephesians 6:10
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What will happen to people who have never heard about Jesus?

“That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9).



The apostle Paul dealt with this question when writing to the church at Rome. In speaking of the light of the law as clearly given in the Old Testament, he says, “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (Romans 2:12). In other words, we will be judged by the light we are given.

Then Paul goes on somewhat of a tangent to discuss the deeper purpose of the law and how even the Gentiles have been given some light. “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (vv. 13–15). So even if the small impulse to do good is planted in the heart of every person, and such a person responds to this divine light, they are keeping the law because “love is the fulfillment of the law” (13:10).

In the same way that every person has physical life because of the power of Christ, so also does each person have spiritual light, a perception of what is right. That divine light might not be very bright and that desire to do good can be snuffed out by evil choices, yet it has been given in some measure to every person.

Earlier Paul explains that “since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Each person is given some capability to see and understand God through nature and through the mind. Though limited, it is sufficient to provide a stepping-stone toward the Creator.



*Dear Lord, thank you for revealing yourself
most clearly through the life of Jesus.*





What is the meaning of baptism?



*“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”
(Romans 6:4).*

The word “baptism” comes from the Greek word “baptizo,” which means to immerse, submerge, or to cleanse by dipping something under water. In one sense, it represents death—the breath “stops” while the person is under water. When we come up from the water, we are “raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1)—resurrected to a new life.

It also represents a new birth. When a baby is born, it comes out of an envelope of water, and it takes a breath. So baptism also represents being born again. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, . . . unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Baptism signifies that new start in our lives, with God in control.

Even Jesus, though He never sinned, set an example for us when He went to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Scripture tells us, “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him” (Matthew 3:16).

Baptism is a ceremony where a person is saying, “I’ve turned away from my sins and have committed my life to Jesus.” It is usually done publicly; a pastor immerses someone and they come up out of the water with all their old sins washed away. Baptism shows that they’ve accepted salvation through Christ.

Naturally, after baptism, a person’s focus should be different. The Bible says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). If we have committed our lives to God, our center of attention should be on spiritual things. Our main focus should be on pleasing God rather than on pleasing ourselves.



Dear Father in heaven, thank you for the example that Jesus set by His baptism. And thank you that we can be miraculously born again and have a new life through Him.



For Further Study: 1 Peter 3:21; Matthew 3:16; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Where was the garden of Eden located?

“The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed” (Genesis 2:8).



I believe that before the flood came on the earth, everyone knew where this garden was located—as an angel was sent to guard the gates to Adam’s and Eve’s first home. Scripture mentions a river that came out of Eden: “Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads” (Genesis 2:10). The four rivers mentioned are Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (Tigris), and Euphrates. Keeping in mind that the world’s geography was greatly altered by the flood, this area corresponds today with the country of Iraq.

I like to believe the Lord raptured this garden from this world to preserve it from the flood. If God can bring the New Jerusalem down from heaven after the millennium, He could have taken the garden up to heaven to save it (Revelation 21:2). A little anecdotal evidence for this can be found in Revelation 22:2, which speaks of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. Since this tree was once in the garden, God might have saved the entire area and will restore it in the earth made new.

As mentioned, after the flood, the earth was radically changed. Perhaps the patriarchs had an approximate idea of where these rivers were now located by astronomy. Or it could be that the two rivers that Noah came upon after the flood reminded him of two rivers he knew before the world changed. Two of the rivers are actually missing, so you are not going to go wandering around and suddenly stumble on the garden.

Did you know that to make lots of oil and coal, it takes a tremendous amount of vegetation to be covered deep underground? Geologists today recognize that though the Middle East, rich with oil, seems largely dry and barren today, it was not always that way.

Finally, in Revelation 22:1, John sees “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God” (Revelation 22:1). That’s a river I’d like to stand next to someday!



Lord, may I someday live in the earth made new, eat from the tree of life, and stand by the river that flows from the throne of God.





Why did God create our world if He knew we would fall into sin?



"Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5).

It is true that God is all knowing. "Do you know how the clouds are balanced, those wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:16).

A lady once asked me if the Lord created our planet as some sort of cosmic experiment. In return, I asked her if she was a parent, and she said yes. I then asked, "Do parents who choose to have children not know that their kids will have free wills and make some bad choices? Of course! Yet love takes risks. God has demonstrated that all of us were made free. He even made creatures that He knew would potentially rebel."

What would it be like if the Lord only made people who were "programmed" to love Him? Obviously, there is something wrong with that because real love cannot be forced. It must be freely given. It was so important to God that humans be free moral agents who could make their own choices that He created people who could truly turn from Him.

Some people suggest that God's knowledge about what will take place in the future somehow interferes with history and people's choices. Others believe the Lord "turns off" this ability to know things ahead of time. But just as a video camera can record events without interfering with those happenings, so God's foreknowledge never violates human freedom.

When our world has run its course and Jesus comes to destroy sin forever, the entire universe will acknowledge, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!" (Revelation 15:3). All will agree that the plans of God to create the world and permit sin to enter was handled with complete fairness and love.

The most incredible part of God's love is that He was even willing to come and die to save people who rebelled against Him. That shows me that the Lord can be trusted.



Dear God, you created our world in order that we might freely choose to love you. I give my heart to you and thank you for the freedom to choose or reject you.



For Further Study: Psalm 19:9; Deuteronomy 7:8; Proverbs 3:12



What is the “abomination of desolation”?

“When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15, 16).



Jesus’ comments regarding the “abomination of desolation” come as a response to two questions from the disciples—first, about the destruction of the Hebrew temple, when there would not be left one stone upon another; second, about the signs of His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). Christ then speaks of this abomination, saying, “There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (v. 21).

Jesus tells us directly that to understand this subject, we must go back to Daniel the prophet. Daniel 8:13 speaks of “the vision ... concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot.”

The first fulfillment of the desolation happened when Roman armies destroyed the Jewish temple in A.D. 70. This is why Jesus says in Luke 21:20, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” This brought a great tribulation to the Jewish people. In fact, Jesus uses the same words as Daniel: “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

The final desolation spoken of by Jesus and first mentioned by Daniel (8:13; 11:31; and 12:11) speaks of the rise of an evil religious power that will, at the end of time, bring desolation into God’s church, His spiritual temple, mingling paganism with Christianity. Just as God gave early Christians a warning to flee Jerusalem, so at the end of time, the Lord gives us a similar warning to come out of Babylon or receive of her plagues. When a corrupt world church unites with worldly powers, we know the time of the end is at hand. Like the apostles, we might need to flee to more desolate places before the great tribulation begins.



*Lord, the cup of iniquity on this earth is almost full.
May I flee to you and find refuge from the tragic
destruction that will take place at your coming.*



For Further Study: Jeremiah 44:22; Mark 13:14; Matthew 23:37, 38

Scan for more on this topic. ►





What did Jesus do before His ministry began?



"He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. ... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51, 52).

When Jesus was 12 years old, He went to Jerusalem with His parents to celebrate the Passover. On his family's return trip, they soon realized He was left in Jerusalem and rushed back to search for Him. They found Jesus in the temple speaking with rabbis and religious leaders.

Jesus said to His parents, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Some believe that at this point, Jesus separated from His parents and went to study under scholars and mystics from the Orient. They point to John 7:15, which says, "The Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?'" Critics still struggle to believe that an uneducated carpenter could teach such sublime truths.

But notice the next few verses—Jesus returned to Nazareth and continued to live under the authority of His earthly parents. During His early years, Christ grew physically, mentally, and spiritually. He followed the normal growth of any other child into adulthood; except, of course, we believe that Jesus never sinned.

The Bible speaks little else of Christ's younger life. We can safely assume that Jesus worked with Joseph in the family business until the father passed away. When He came to teach in His hometown, everyone knew Him. He hadn't lived in China or Rome and become a stranger (Mark 6:3).

Jesus likely worked in the family business until John the Baptist began preaching. At that time, He knew His ministry was about to begin.

I believe Jesus was educated at the feet of His mother. Jewish children were among the most literate, and there is little reason to think that Christ grew up in a home without education. His primary lesson books were the Hebrew Scriptures and nature. It shows that a simple, quiet home where everyone helps out can enhance the growth of a child in a way no "sophisticated" curriculum ever could.



Lord, just as you grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and others, I pray that you will help me to develop my mind, body, and spirit for your glory.



For Further Study: Luke 2:39, 40; Matthew 2:19–23



How could David be called a man after God's own heart when he committed adultery? Why did God allow David to keep Bathsheba as his wife?

"When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD"
(2 Samuel 11:26, 27).



David suffered terribly because of his sin with Bathsheba. He lost four children, including the first baby between him and Bathsheba, the fruit of their forbidden romance. David's son, Absalom, killed Amnon, and then Absalom was later killed. And David lost yet another son. He also lost the respect of his people, and his reputation was besmirched.

But David thoroughly repented. Keep in mind, he stayed on his face for seven days in grief over his sins—begging God for mercy. And God not only forgave him, He even blessed his relationship with Bathsheba, showing they had been truly forgiven. Furthermore, David's next child, Solomon, was also blessed to be the ancestor of the Messiah.

This is great evidence of God's grace and forgiveness. Suppose for a moment that you make some terrible decisions in your life that are irreversible. Does that mean you cannot be saved? Absolutely not! God can straighten us out no matter how far we've walked off the path.

It would have been a cruel act for David to use royal power to put away Bathsheba after the death of Uriah and the death of their baby.

It's much like the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. She'd been married five times and was living with another man. Jesus forgave and accepted her even in the midst of her sin. He comes to us just as we are. Isn't that great news? Though He will not always reverse the earthly consequences of our poor decisions, we may always return to Him.



Lord, you can take anything and bring good out of it. Though some of the things I've done have displeased you, please forgive me and may your will be done.





Will we recognize our loved ones in heaven?



“The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53).

I’d like to address this question by asking another: When the saved get to heaven, will their perceptions and observations be better or worse? Obviously, it’s going to be better. The Bible says, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We are able to recognize our loved ones now, and in heaven that ability will become even stronger.

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, those disciples were able to recognize the visitors from heaven—Moses and Elijah—who had already received their immortal bodies? Peter said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Matthew 17:4). It’s possible that in heaven, we might even be able to recognize people we’ve never met or seen before. They might have lived at a different time, but they will still each have their personal identities.

Obviously, in heaven we will not have the same bodies that we had on Earth. That’s something for which to be thankful! The apostle Paul tells us “we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51–53).

After His crucifixion, Jesus’ disciples were able to recognize Him in His immortal, transformed state. So our loved ones will know us, and we will know our loved ones. We won’t have to walk around and take fingerprints in heaven to identify people, for we will have enhanced knowledge.



Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and making us unique individuals who will know and will be known to our loved ones in your kingdom.



For Further Study: Mark 9:2–6; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:42–54

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Do the Gospels differ on the events of the resurrection?

“On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb” (John 20:1).



The varying details in the resurrection accounts are complementary, not contradictory. Each writer actually focuses on a different aspect of the event. For instance, John writes about his experience with Peter. Mark looks at Mary, and Matthew seems to focus more on the women who came to the tomb. Of course, all these individuals came to the tomb but at different times.

In my study, I believe that the first one to the tomb was Mary Magdalene. After she discovered Jesus wasn't there, she ran to tell the other women. Then together they returned to the tomb, at which time an angel appeared to them.

They then left to tell others. Mary went to tell Peter and John, who immediately came to the tomb. This is when John “outran” Peter and Mary. Peter went in first, and then John went in. They saw the garments, then they left to go tell their fellow disciples. Mary eventually caught up with them and, after the two men left, she remained behind. This is when Christ appeared to her.

What about the number of angels? Depending on their vantage point, the first visitors might have seen only one angel. But when they entered the tomb, apparently another angel spoke to them. While we don't have all the details outlined, it's reasonable to believe there were two different angels.

Ultimately, these apparent differences confirm the truthfulness of the event, rather than refute it. If all four Gospels gave exactly the same story and details, we would be suspicious it was all copied and contrived. The different perspectives tell us these were the sincere observations of those who experienced that remarkable day. A careful reading of all the accounts reveals a flow of events that confirmed that Christ indeed rose from the dead!



Dear Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to break the grip of death on our lives. I commit myself into your care today, knowing that someday you will raise to life all who give themselves completely to you.





How do you put God first when you and your spouse disagree?



“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3).

God wants married couples to get along with each other. His Word says we should live harmoniously with one another (Romans 12:16) and that we should “submit to one another” in reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21). With ordinary conflicts, we should try as much as possible to put the other person above ourselves.

However, there are times when conflicts arise in which conscience is involved. For example, sometimes spouses disagree over religion. Sometimes God leads a person in a new direction spiritually, but the spouse doesn’t see things the same way. This can lead to major conflict.

The Bible is clear that the husband should be the spiritual leader of the family (Ephesians 5:23). But if the husband asks the wife to do something that violates her conscience or violates the Word of God, she simply shouldn’t do it. In a case like that, a person needs to put God above everyone else and follow where He leads (see Matthew 10:36, 37).

At the same time, we need to be sure that we aren’t letting a “convenient” interpretation of Scripture get in the way of fully devoting ourselves to our spouse!

It’s a tough position to be in. It can be very distressing to have your spouse opposing what your conscience tells you to do. Under those circumstances, it’s best to say, “I love you and I respect you, and I hope we can work this out, but I have to put God first.”

Your spouse should respect your moral convictions, but sometimes that’s not the case. It requires faith and courage to stand up for what is right, but the principles of obedience to God need to have priority in your life. Try to be tactful and loving, but firm. If the Lord is leading you in another direction, you need to do what you know God wants you to do.



Lord, help us to live at peace with others as much as possible. And give us the faith we need to follow our consciences and obey your Word even when others oppose us.



For Further Study: 1 Peter 3:7; Matthew 22:37; John 14:15; Proverbs 15:1



What is the meaning of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones?

“Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ ” (Ezekiel 37:11).



While Ezekiel's dream is certainly unusual and grabs our attention, keep in mind that many Bible writers—such as Daniel, Zechariah, and John—portray apocalyptic visions full of symbolic imagery. We should also understand it was not unusual in Bible times to see a valley filled with the bleached bones of the slain following a major battle.

When this vision was given to Ezekiel, the Israelites had been conquered by the Babylonians. They believed their future as a nation was dead and gone. So this vision was to encourage them that if God could resurrect life from dry bones strewn throughout a valley, He could restore them as a nation.

I also believe this symbolism is meant for “spiritual Israel” today—God's church at the end of time. In the same way Ezekiel's preaching brought the bones in the valley back to life, the power of God's Word can revive the church and raise up a powerful spiritual army to fight God's battles.

We shouldn't miss a core reminder here that God has the power to raise the dead and bring us to heaven. “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 37:12). But this vision is more specifically a picture of God's work in raising up and restoring His people after it appears as though all hope is gone.

Some Christians today can identify with the hopeless feelings of Israelites who were captives in Babylon. They long to be set free from sin and feel they are dead and dry in their hearts. Like a valley of dry bones, some churches are certainly dead to the things of the Lord. But through God's Spirit and through the prophetic preaching of the Word, Christians can be revived and returned to their place among God's people, the remnant who will go to the place prepared for them in heaven.



*Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit today.
Speak to my heart. Bring to life your Word
in my mind that I may be established
in your heavenly kingdom forever.*





Are the days in Genesis 1 and 2 literal or symbolic of long periods of time?



"In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exodus 20:11).

Some say the creation of the world did not take place over six 24-hours days, but over 6 million years or six variable but otherwise lengthy epochs. That belief is very difficult to mesh with Genesis 1, which says, "The evening and the morning were the first day" (verse 5).

If vegetation was created on the third day and the sun was not created until the fourth, we know green plants could have survived that day without sunlight, but it's a stretch to think vegetation could last 1,000 years without the sun—or a million years!

Those who try to combine atheistic views of evolution with the Bible have to modify what Scripture says to make such theories fit. David wrote: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6, 9). This does not sound as if the earth evolved over eons.

The foundation for this long-age evolutionary teaching is a dating system that is flawed and requires significant faith. When you look closely at reports on their methods of calculating time, such as carbon dating, you see that it all rests on a foundation of sand. All radioactive dating methods require deep assumptions that make it impossible to objectively measure age. It is unreliable since it supposes that environmental conditions on earth have always been consistent. Of course, the Bible teaches that the world's environment went through a radical, catastrophic change about 5,000 years ago.

The fossil record also tells us there has been tremendous geological change. We find that all these animals were covered instantly by giant deposits of mud. The idea that dinosaurs and other animals died off slowly because of climate change just cannot be supported, and more scientists now acknowledge that it must have been the result of a massive flood. Lots of theories have come and gone, but God's Word remains. It can be trusted!



Lord, just as you created the world in a miraculous way, I pray that you will recreate my heart. Make me anew in your image today.



For Further Study: Exodus 20:8–11; Psalm 19; Colossians 1:15–20



Should you ever stop forgiving someone who repeatedly offends you?

"Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).



A forgiving nature is one of the attributes of God. "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy" (Psalm 86:5). God wants to forgive and cleanse us from sin (1 John 1:9). His followers also need to be forgiving.

The disciple Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter must have thought that would be generous, but Jesus answered, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21).

He then told Peter the parable about the man whose master forgave him a great debt. But instead of extending that forgiveness to others, the man had a debtor, who owed him a pittance, thrown into prison. "Then his master . . . said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'" (Matthew 18:32, 33). Forgiveness is not a suggestion; it is a requirement.

Jesus taught about forgiveness on several occasions. After His model prayer, which mentions forgiving our debtors, He added, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15). That's pretty plain, isn't it?

This, however, does not mean you need to endlessly submit yourself to abusive behavior. It is possible to forgive a person and still accept that you cannot associate with him or her.

Likewise, there might be times when people won't acknowledge or accept your forgiveness or be willing to forgive you. We should always try to reconcile. But if you've reached out to someone, done all you could, told them you're sorry, and they still haven't accepted that, at some point you need to move on. It's not your burden to continue to grovel; the door is open for them.



Dear Lord, you have so freely forgiven me though I am undeserving. Help me never to hesitate to be forgiving toward others.





Can a person be saved through his or her spouse?



*“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”
(2 Corinthians 6:14).*

Many have asked me if it's okay, based on 1 Corinthians 7, to marry an unbeliever. Some think that such a union can result in the salvation of a spouse, almost like an automatic ticket to heaven. I don't believe that is what the apostle Paul intends to convey. While it is true that a person can have a sanctifying influence on their spouse, salvation is an individual matter.

Let's look at the passage. First, Paul writes to encourage those who are already married to an unbeliever to stay married and not get divorced: “To the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).

Then Paul goes on to explain, “A woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband” (verses 13, 14).

What does it mean that the “unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife?” We find the answer in verse 16. “For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” We also read that husbands “may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1, 2). In other words, your example can be a saving influence to an unbelieving spouse. But there is no guarantee of salvation.

Again, the passage in Corinthians is specifically for couples who are already married and one becomes a Christian. If you're already married to an unbeliever, don't automatically get a divorce. Be a positive influence in his or her life. For those who are not yet married, Paul's advice is best: Do not join your life with an unbeliever.



Dear God, may my life be a sanctifying influence on all of my family members: spouses, children, parents, and others. May they see Jesus through me.



For Further Study: Amos 3:3; Deuteronomy 7:1–4; Revelation 18:4



Who is the woman in Revelation 12:1 and what do the 12 stars on her head mean?

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1).



In this passage, God’s church is represented as a bride. We find support for this in Jeremiah 6:2: “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman.” The apostle Paul also supports this picture when he writes, “I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). See also Ephesians 5:22, 23 and Revelation 19:7, 8.

This bride is spoken of as being “clothed with the sun.” Jesus is represented by the sun in the Bible. “The Lord God is a sun” (Psalm 84:11). And also, “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2). The righteousness of Christ is a garment spoken of throughout Scripture as the clothing worn by the redeemed.

She also stands with “the moon under her feet.” What could the church stand on that reflects the light of the sun? I believe nothing pointed to Christ more powerfully than the Jewish sacrificial system. Jesus said all the Old Testament Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39). All these symbols and types pointed toward—or reflect—the great atonement of Jesus on Calvary.

Finally, the number 12 represents the church and its leadership. In the Old Testament, there were 12 patriarchs of the 12 tribes and 12 judges. The New Jerusalem will have 12 foundations and 12 gates into the city. The number 12 is important to the Lord. So when we look at the 12 stars on her head, it makes sense that the head represents leadership—the 12 apostles who crowned the work of the early church.

The most important question is, will you be part of the bride of Christ—God’s remnant people? The Lord invites each of us to be part of that bridal party and the marriage supper of the Lamb!



Lord, I dedicate my life to you. I want to be ready when Jesus returns. I choose to be a part of God’s remnant people.



For Further Study: Isaiah 62:5; Matthew 25:1; Revelation 21:2

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Did Jesus use His divine power to only do good things for others?



"These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues"
(Mark 16:17).

Absolutely. When you carefully study all of the stories about Jesus written in the Gospels, His life was one of continuous service to others. Everything Christ did was to glorify God and help others. You see this in His teaching and acts of healing.

However, it is important to keep the following in mind: The power that Christ used in His work is also available to us—His people. Jesus said, "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" (John 14:12). Just as Christ raised the dead, so also His apostles raised the dead. Jesus taught and healed. The book of Acts records that His disciples did the same. And so may we.

Christ never used His supernatural power for any selfish reasons. He could have used His power to save Himself. He could have refreshed Himself from sleepiness while in the boat, but He chose to remain tired. He could have used His power while He was thirsting on the cross, but He had a greater mission than Himself.

Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to use His divine power to satisfy His agonizing hunger. The devil knew that Jesus had the power to work that miracle. He tried to provoke Christ to draw on His divinity for relief. Why would that have been such a triumph for Satan? He could have used that to sustain his charges that God required an obedience that no human could produce. If Jesus had failed to overcome the tempter with the same nature we have, and by the same means available to us, the devil would have proven that obedience is an impossible requirement. Satan understood that Jesus could not use His divine power to save Himself and to save man at the same time. This is what made the test such a severe and agonizing experience for Christ.



Dear Jesus, thank you for using your divine power only to save lost people. May that same power live inside me today that I, too, may glorify the Father.



For Further Study: Matthew 21:21; Luke 10:17



Does the Bible support having multiple wives?

*“So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate”
(Matthew 19:6).*



The Pharisees once asked Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Matthew 19:3). I believe Christ’s response to their question illustrates a principle that gives light on the question about polygamy. Jesus told the Pharisees, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (v. 8).

The same can be said about polygamy. It was never part of God’s perfect plan for a man to have more than one wife. When we look to the creation of Adam in Eden, God did not create an Eve and a Sally for him. There was just one wife.

While you can find some laws and provisions for multiple wives in Scripture, just look at all the grief and heartache such homes created. The stories of Abraham and Hagar, of Jacob with Leah and Rachel, of David and Bathsheba, and the sad commentary of Solomon and his multiple wives only point to the imperfect homes and the many problems that plagued them.

There are scenarios in Scripture that are less than ideal among God’s people. Israel wanted a king during the time of Samuel. Because of their stubborn insistence, God reluctantly gave them a king. Paul gives us another angle on how God deals with those who do not always know the ideal. He says, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Polygamy goes against the oneness that God first set up in the marriage of Adam and Eve. A lasting marriage is one in which both partners “forsake all others.” Even though we find plural marriages and slavery as a reality during the time of the Patriarchs, they were clearly not the divine ideal. It is “two who become one flesh” that provides the foundation for true intimacy. It also reflects the relationship between Christ and His church.



*Dear Lord, help me to commit myself
completely to your perfect will. I will forsake
anything that comes between us. I give myself
wholly to you in every area of my life.*





Why were the Ten Commandments put on two tablets instead of just one?



“Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. Now the tablets were the work of God” (Exodus 32:15, 16).

Some wonder how the commandments were divided between the two tables of stone. Some believe that there were five commandments on one table and five on the other. Others think they were split between four and six.

When you study the Ten Commandments, you see that the first four commands speak of mankind's relationship with God and the last six deal with our relationships with one another. Likewise, in the “Lord's Prayer,” Matthew 6:9–15 and Luke 11:2–4, you find the first three petitions dealing with God and the last four addressing mankind's needs.

The rabbis typically divided the commandments between four and six. In fact, when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, He commented on this division. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39). Then He said, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (v. 40).

Some suggest that the reason the two tables were written on both sides of the stone was that one set was a copy. This idea comes from the covenant laws of the time in which both parties had a copy of the agreement.

Whatever your view, the important message is that the Ten Commandments are summarized in love for God and our fellowman, and the Lord would like to write His law on your heart. “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” (Jeremiah 31:33).



*Dear Lord, write your law on my heart today.
Put within my mind your commandments
that I may reflect your glory in my life.*



For Further Study: Deuteronomy 6:5; Exodus 24:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Are there two different accounts of creation in Genesis?

"I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants" (Genesis 28:13).



Most liberal scholars question the authenticity of the Bible, and one fervent point of their attack has been on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Through their method of "higher criticism," they claim Moses did not write these books; rather, they say that there were at least four writers, over a long period of time, and an "editor" who pieced them together.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are viewed as written by two people supposedly because of different styles of writing and some alleged contradictions. For instance, the name for God, Elohim, is used in Genesis 1, and the name Jehovah is used in Genesis 2. The assumption is that this indicates different writers. But a single author can write with a different emphasis, even within the same piece of literature!

In fact, the name Elohim perfectly fits the context of Genesis 1, where this name emphasizes God's strength. The name Jehovah brings out the moral and spiritual nature of the Lord, especially in His desire to have a relationship with His people. It's interesting that both these terms are used in a single verse in Genesis 28:13.

Regarding two different creation account, one scholar writes, "Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man as the last of a series, and without any details, whereas in Genesis 2 man is the center of interest and more specific details are given about him and his setting. There is no incompatible duplication here at all. Failure to recognize the complementary nature of the subject-distinction between a skeleton outline of all creation on the one hand, and the concentration in detail on man and his immediate environment on the other, borders on [dogmatic]."

For me, the bottom line is that I accept by faith that Moses, under the inspiration of God, gave us an accurate account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. The first chapter simply shows us the overall account, and the second highlights the personal connection God has with human beings.



Dear Lord, by faith I accept you as my powerful Creator and personal Redeemer.





Does the Bible give guidelines on burying the dead? Is cremation okay?



“When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them” (1 Samuel 31:11, 12).

There doesn't appear to be any Bible mandate on how to bury the dead. Most examples in the Bible speak of people who died as being buried or placed into caves or tombs. We do have a couple of examples in Scripture of people who were cremated and who will be in God's kingdom.

When Jonathan, the son of King Saul, was killed in battle, his body was mutilated and hung on the wall of the enemy. His body was later recovered by soldiers and was cremated since it had been desecrated by the Philistines. David blessed them for caring for Jonathan's body in this way.

The Bible speaks of us returning as “ashes” or dust to the ground. Though it's not a pleasant subject, we know that when a person dies, the body decomposes and turns back into the elements. It can happen slowly, or it can take place quickly, such as in a crematorium. The bottom line is, unless Jesus comes, we will all die and eventually turn into ashes and dirt.

Some worry that if they are cremated or buried at sea, it will make it difficult for the Lord to resurrect them. But God is not using “old material” to recreate us. “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). The Lord will take the essence of who we are and place it in a new, glorified body.

Let's now turn our attention to the glorious promise of the resurrection. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). I look forward to that day! Don't you?



Dear Lord, thank you for the hope and promise of the resurrection. Because Jesus rose from the dead, I may look forward to everlasting life.



For Further Study: Job 19:26, 27; Daniel 12:2; Luke 24:39



Will our planet be the “new earth” after Jesus’ second coming?

*“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away”
(Revelation 21:1).*



God created Eden and the rest of our world with perfection and beauty, but then sin came and polluted the earth. The Lord’s plan was corrupted, perverted, and tainted by the devil. However, Satan will not ultimately confound God’s plan. The Lord is going to create a new heaven (a new atmosphere) and a new earth.

The Bible teaches that someday “the meek . . . shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). It’s pretty clear that, right now, proud and controlling people mostly rule the Earth. But someday, this will change. Daniel says, “The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:27). The Earth will not be in the same condition that it is now, for the Lord will make “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

The apostle Peter encourages us, “We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). When will this take place? First, the righteous will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at the second coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then they will spend a millennium in heaven, living and reigning with Jesus (Revelation 20:4).

At the end of the millennium in heaven, John writes, “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2). The New Jerusalem is the city of God, and its new home will be this planet. There will be no pollution; it will be this Earth *made new*. In this new home, “They shall build houses and inhabit them, they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit” and “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Isaiah 65:21, 25). Our new home will be a real place!



*Dear Jesus, I look forward to Eden restored
and the earth made new, where I will be
with you and worship you forever.*



For Further Study: John 14:1–3; Micah 4:8; Philippians 3:21

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What if you have a desire to get married but God's providence calls on you to be single?



"There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matthew 19:12).

I believe some are called to serve God as single men and women. Jesus acknowledged this when He said that some are born eunuchs (referring not only to men, but to singles), some are made eunuchs, and some choose to be eunuchs. God says there are people who serve Him best in their singleness, foremost among them being Jesus.

There are other examples in the Bible. Daniel and his friends, for instance, were made eunuchs after being carried off to Babylon. They served God powerfully, even influencing nations, despite the fact they could never marry.

The apostle Paul was single, choosing that life so he could serve God more effectively. His advice to others was, "I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:8, 9).

If you are in the place where you're wondering if the single life is what God has in mind for you or whether you should get married, don't worry about it. If God wants you to be with someone, He's going to work it out. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

Instead, pray, "Lord, I'm yours. I'm willing to wait for the right person—or no person." While you wait, have peace and do whatever God gives you to do, whether it's work, education, or serving Him in your local church. Do that with all your heart, and see if He doesn't surprise you with something.

Desires are normal; it's natural for every healthy male and female to feel a longing for the companionship of the opposite sex. That doesn't necessarily mean you should follow that desire. Our desires should be controlled and directed. Patiently trust in the Lord.



Dear Lord, help me to seek you first, and your kingdom, knowing that everything else that I need will be added according to your plan and timing.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 7; Romans 12:1; Matthew 6:33



Why does the Bible say the Lord is a “jealous God” when jealousy is wrong?

“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exodus 20:5).



There are different types of jealousy. One is driven by selfishness and control; the other is motivated by exclusive love. For instance, parents can be “jealous” for the lives of their children. Many would give up their own lives to ensure a son’s or daughter’s well-being. Watching over your children and being sensitive to evil influences around them is a type of jealousy that is good.

In the same way, our heavenly Father is jealous over us. He watches over and protects us. When you think of how the devil hates us and wants to harm us, it’s good to know that we have a jealous God who will stand up in our defense.

What might we think about a spouse who wasn’t jealous if their partner committed adultery? We could conclude they don’t really care about their relationship!

Another angle on understanding God’s jealousy is to remember that the Lord is righteous. God’s emotions are not like man’s emotions, which are tainted with sin. Also, the Lord understands that we cannot serve Him with a divided heart. God does not share His glory with other “gods.” We cannot serve the Lord and serve another. One of the clearest warnings on this topic is found later in Exodus:

“Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice” (34:12–15).

I’m glad God loves us enough to be jealous of our relationship with Him!



*Lord, may I never put anything between us
that would cut my relationship off with you.
I devote my heart completely to you.*





When the Bible says Babylon will never be rebuilt, is it just symbolic?



“He cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!’ ” (Revelation 18:2).

Babylon was a enemy of the Israelites. Isaiah gives us insight into this nation when he explains how the literal city would be destroyed by the Medes. “It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls; ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there” (Isaiah 13:20, 21).

Babylon became a symbol in Revelation for apostate religious organizations that oppose Christ and His people, especially at the close of time. In Revelation 14, we read about the fall of Babylon in the second angel’s message. Revelation 18 expands on her destruction with a final “loud cry” to “come out of her” so that people do not share in her final destruction.

Whereas Revelation 17 describes Babylon as a “mother of harlots” (v.5) and a prostitute who is executed, Revelation 18 uses a metaphor of a wealthy city being sacked. Though the term “Babylon” has been used over the centuries to describe different organizations that oppose God, modern Babylon stands for apostate Christian churches that have departed from the “everlasting gospel,” including the Roman apostasy of the early centuries and the more recent departure of mainstream Protestantism.

One of the modern rulers of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, wanted to rebuild this city with the purpose of overthrowing this biblical prophecy. His efforts were interrupted by war. He now is dead, and the tourist site is once again being reclaimed by the desert.

Those who take up the call and separate from spiritual Babylon in the last days, who become messengers of this final warning, will be like lights that “illuminate” the earth with glory (Revelation 18:1). These servants of God will proclaim heaven’s last call to the world.



Lord, I choose to be a voice for you, calling others to come out of Babylon and join your people who stand in truth.



For Further Study: Jeremiah 50:1–3; Isaiah 14; 1 Peter 5:13



What does the Bible say about suicide?

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:38, 39).



This is a very sensitive and difficult issue. Most of us know someone—perhaps a friend or family member—who has taken his or her own life. Some wonder whether suicide is the unpardonable sin. I don’t believe so. The Bible gives no indication that suicide equals the automatic loss of salvation. It is, however, a very troubling and tragic decision that complicates an individual’s destiny.

The Bible says, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17), and suicide, typically, is the result of a total loss of hope and faith. Further, the Bible commands, “You shall not murder,” which naturally includes oneself. So, generally speaking, it would appear to many that if the last acts of a person’s life were to lose faith and then commit “self-murder,” it would not bode well for one’s future fate. Instead, it’s best for us to remember that where there is life, there is hope (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

But even with suicide, there can be hope because God looks at the heart. Only God truly knows the human heart, which is why He has commanded us not to judge someone’s eternal destiny based upon what might be a reckless final decision.

However, I can say with total assurance that it would not be God’s will for anyone to take his or her own life as an escape from this world. He loves each of us with a deeper love than we can know, and He wants to give us an abundance of life. When things get tough and emotions low, remember nothing can separate you from the love of God and that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (Romans 8:39; 1 Corinthians 13:7).



Dear Father, hold me close as I consider this troubling topic, and help me to remember that no circumstances can separate us from your love.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Psalm 34:17–20

Need help with suicidal thoughts? Call New Life Clinics at 800-639-5433 for immediate assistance. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.



Can people who commit suicide go to heaven?



"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

It goes without saying that most suicides are the result of extreme discouragement, pain, depression, stress, unbalanced brain chemistry, and compromised thinking processes. God holds us accountable only for what we know we are doing; contemplate this: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

God is far more merciful than we can ever imagine (see Ephesians 2:4). There are some who have taken their lives because they felt their grief or pain was more than they could bear at that particular moment in time—and in a rash decision, they ended it when maybe, had they waited but five minutes, the urge would have passed. They loved the Lord, they served the Lord, but they were in so much agony because of physical suffering or some emotional devastation or chemical change, they tragically took their own lives. We can't possibly know what all the circumstances are. We don't know what kinds of pressures and attacks they were under.

But God knows. I don't think He judges a whole life by a moment when a person might have been overwhelmed. God takes everything into account. I believe He will take every case into consideration and evaluate it individually.

If you've lost someone to suicide, place that situation in God's hands and "trust in the LORD with all your heart" (Proverbs 3:5). Remember, the Lord loves that person and wants him or her saved even more than you do. Pray, "Lord, since I don't know the answer now, I'm going to trust you. I'm going to have faith that you will do the right thing, and whatever you do I will trust." And leave it at that, because worrying about it will only tear your heart up.



Father, may my heart join with those who are grieving and who have lost loved ones to suicide. I place this in your hands and trust that your love for them surpasses our own and that you will do the best thing.



For Further Study: Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 147:3; Matthew 11:28

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The Bible says God spoke to Moses “face to face,” but later says no one can see God’s face and live. Isn’t that a contradiction?

“The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).



The Lord said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (v.20). How do we harmonize these two verses?

One way is to understand this phrase as a figure of speech. The apostle John wrote, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face” (2 John 1:12). He’s saying, “I can speak to you through writing or in person.” The term “face to face” can simply mean to be in one’s presence.

Another approach to these verses is to understand that Moses might have spoken face to face with God the Son (Jesus), not God the Father. (See also Genesis 32:30.)

When you study other passages in which God revealed Himself (in part) to Ezekiel, Daniel, and John, you grasp that the powerful brilliance of the Lord’s being is just too much for sinful people to bear. They often fell down as though they were dead! Jesus also stated, “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18). Obviously, He must be speaking of the Father, which is why He said, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father” (John 6:46).

Of course, people saw God the Son when He came to this earth, but seeing Jesus was not limited to New Testament times. Many scholars believe Christ revealed Himself in the Old Testament (called *Christophanies*). For instance, when Joshua saw the captain of the Lord’s armies, many believe this must have been the son of God before the incarnation.

It seems to me that Moses saw God the Son, yet his request to see the Father was denied. The best way to reconcile the two verses in Exodus might be to recognize the distinction as being made between the Father and the Son.



Lord, I long for the day in which I can see you face to face, not through a darkened veil. In my daily study of the Word, please reveal yourself more fully to me.





Doesn't the Bible teach in Luke 17 that there will be a rapture?



"In that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:34–36).

“Secret rapture” advocates often use this text as evidence of a time when Christ will supposedly snatch away His saints from the world. But to get the whole picture, we need to start with verse 26, when Jesus described Noah’s day: “Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (v. 30). Then He explained that “one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.”

For the Jews, to be “taken away” meant they would be carried out of the Promised Land as a form of judgment, such as when Babylon and Assyria carried them away as captives.

In the days of Noah, remember how some were taken and some were left? Those taken away by the flood perished. Jesus said the flood “took them all away; so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:39).

Luke 17:37 makes this clear. The disciples wanted to know where these others would be taken. Jesus explained they would be taken away in judgment. “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” (See also Matthew 24:28.)

In one parable, Jesus says the lost are taken first: “Gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them” (Matthew 13:30). Just as in Noah’s day, the righteous will be spared as the wicked are taken away in judgment. The bodies of the wicked will be scattered over the earth.

There is no secret rapture being hinted at here. Two people might be outwardly doing the same thing, sleeping in a bed or working in the field, but God looks upon the heart and some will be lost and some will be saved. The doctrine of the “secret rapture” is unknown in the Bible.



Dear Lord, may the days in which we live remind us to be ready for your soon return. May I remember today that I am safe in your hands!



For Further Study: John 17:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible teach that the saved will be raptured before the great tribulation?

“At that time Michael shall stand up. ... 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, everyone who is found written in the book”
(Daniel 12:1, 2).



The battle of Armageddon, the seven last plagues, and the great tribulation happen at approximately the same time. According to the prophet Daniel, the great tribulation comes *before* the saints are caught up to meet the Lord. Jesus said, “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation. . . . But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:9, 13).

Just as the children of Israel were in Egypt *during* the great plagues, God’s people at the end will be in the world *during* the seven last plagues. Yet God will save us *through* the plagues! “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Jesus promised His followers, “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” (John 14:3). Christ speaks clearly about this when He says, “He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31).

So the saints are caught up with the Lord in the air and reign with Him in heaven for a thousand years. After that time, the Holy City descends to the earth, then the wicked are raised back to life and the devil marshals them to attack God’s city, the New Jerusalem. This is the final battle of Armageddon, a battle between good and evil, between Christ and Satan.



Dear Lord, your soon return will be no secret. I give my life to you and long for the day when all your children will be caught up to meet you in the air.





In heaven, will we have memories of everything about our life on this earth?



*“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”
(Revelation 21:4).*

If there will be no crying in heaven, some wonder if our memories will be erased of all the sad events and the people who did not make it to heaven.

It's hard to imagine, but even now there are times when there is sadness in heaven. Just as the angels rejoice when a sinner is saved, they grieve when a person is lost (Luke 15:7). Surely there was great sadness in heaven when Jesus suffered on the cross. In the same way, during the 1,000 years in heaven, we'll experience sorrow for loved ones who are not there with us. And, of course, after the millennium, as we behold the final destruction of the lost, we will share in God's sadness.

But this will also mark the end of all sorrow. It is at this point when God recreates our planet and promises to “wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Just as time can heal all things, so the Lord will wipe away all tears as the ceaseless ages begin. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17). He will give us a gift of joy that will eclipse all the former painful memories.

It's not that we couldn't recall painful memories if we wanted, as if God erased our brains. We will certainly never forget how Jesus redeemed us from sin on Calvary's cross. But after a million years in paradise, we just won't need to review our sad memories.

When speaking to His disciples about leaving, Jesus said, “A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world” (John 16:21). In the same way, the glories of paradise and Jesus will overshadow all the former gloom.



*Lord, thank you for peace that surpasses
all my understanding about the new earth
and the healing I will experience.*



For Further Study: Psalm 16:11; 34:18; Isaiah 25:8

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Why do the genealogies of Christ differ between Matthew and Luke?

"Jesus ... began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23).



The writers of Matthew and Luke were communicating to two different groups of readers, so they approach Jesus' genealogy from different angles.

Matthew writes to a Jewish audience and establishes Jesus as the Messiah via His lineage through the promised seed of Abraham and King David, perhaps the two most prominent ancestors in Israel's history. Matthew provides this evidence to help convince people that Christ is the Anointed One from God, prophesied in Scripture. He follows the line of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

Luke, a physician, writes mostly to the Gentiles and follows Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam, who was a "son of God." In other words, Christ is connected not just to the Jewish people, but to the entire human race. Because Mary's conception was through the Holy Spirit, there was some question whether God placed any essence of Joseph's DNA into Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke are careful not to firmly link Jesus as the actual son of Joseph; Luke uses the phrase "as was supposed." It is believed that Luke's lineage follows Mary's father or Joseph's father-in-law.

Ancient genealogists did not trace nor categorize lineages in the same way we do. Often, a grandfather would still be referred to as a father to a grandson. A son could be any male descendent. Not every generation was always listed. Matthew's cluster of "fourteen" generations is used to help establish Jesus with David. In Hebrew, the numerical value of David's name is 14.

Finally, let's remember that the apostle Paul warns us about getting too caught up in studying genealogies, saying not to "give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification" (1 Timothy 1:4). I'm glad that my salvation is based on my spiritual adoption. Paul writes, "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7).



Dear Lord, I believe Jesus is the Son of God and I accept Him as my Savior. I am adopted into the family of God and know that I am a child of God.





Will non-Christians who live a good life receive less punishment or possibly be saved?



“That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few” (Luke 12:47, 48).

The Bible is clear that everyone is rewarded according to what they’ve done: “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12).

Jesus also seems to suggest that there will be varying degrees of punishment for the wicked. In Luke 12:48, He adds, “Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” So someone who knows God’s will and does wrong is going to be more culpable than someone who is sinful but didn’t know as much.

If everybody burns in hellfire forever, then everyone gets the same punishment. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. According to Jesus, people receive different consequences. Some poor souls raised in total ignorance of right and wrong might simply be as though they were never born. Some may be burnt up quickly. People are going to suffer on judgment day, but the Bible tells us a time is coming when there is no more suffering, when all the former things are passed away (see Revelation 21:4, 5).

Scripture plainly tells us that we need Jesus in order to be saved. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). No one else can save us.

Living a “good” life won’t save us either. “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). However, there are people who never had the chance to hear about Christ or the Bible. If they followed the light God gave them through His Spirit and turned away from wrong, I imagine God could choose to save them. “Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11).



Lord, may I take every opportunity today to share your love with those who come across my path.



For Further Study: Romans 2:6; John 3:36



Did the “war in heaven” take place before or after the time of Adam and Eve?

“War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan ... and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7–9).



I believe that the Bible teaches this war began *before* our world was created. It doesn’t tell us exactly how long this went on. We do know from Scripture that the devil was once an undefiled angel named Lucifer. He rebelled against God and became the fallen angel now known as Satan, meaning “adversary.” In other words, the Lord did not *make* a devil.

But when did God cast Satan out of heaven? Did this war between good and evil start before or after Adam and Eve? The Bible tells us, “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8).

Now God created the garden of Eden and, in the context of freewill, placed a test of Adam’s and Eve’s loyalty. He warned them about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, obviously, somebody was going to be tempting them to turn away from the Lord right from the beginning. It certainly was not God tempting them. “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” (James 1:13).

So in order for Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, he must have rebelled before the creation of our world. It might have even added to the devil’s jealous rebellion when God created our first parents, because angels cannot procreate. The devil does not have creative power, but Adam and Eve could create in their own image through the union of love. Because God made man in His own image and the devil hates God, it might have inspired Satan to especially focus his anger on the first couple.



Lord, today when I am tempted, give me wisdom and strength to immediately turn to you, my help in times of trouble.



For Further Study: Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18; Ezekiel 28:14

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Why does God sometimes seem silent when we need Him most?



“Behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word” (Matthew 15:22, 23 KJV).

Most sincere Christians have asked this important and perplexing question at some time in their lives. I think we need to remember that when we ask God for something and it seems as though He is silent, He might still be answering us, though maybe not in the way we want or expect Him to answer.

If we ask God for direction, or to relieve some stressful situation, it might seem as though nothing is happening when, in fact, He could be asking us to keep trusting and to wait patiently.

God has three answers He can give to our prayers—yes, no, or wait. If an answer doesn’t come quickly, perhaps circumstances have not ripened to where God is prepared to act. Maybe other individuals are involved in our request and God is working on their hearts. The timing might not be just right. In this situation, keep praying, keep asking, keep believing, and keep trusting. If we are praying according to His will, God has promised to answer, but He will give us the answer we need at the right time. (See His promise in Psalm 32:8.)

Sometimes God has already given the answer in His Word. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Search the Scriptures, and you might discover some light for your specific situation.

Finally, when the Canaanite woman came to Jesus and begged Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter, at first He did not answer because He was testing her faith. With determination, she continued to plead for His help. Jesus then responded, “Great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire” (Matthew 15:28). And He healed her daughter. In this story, we see the critical importance of perseverance and faith in our prayers.



Dear Father, when it seems like your answer is delayed, help me to wait patiently, always seeking your will with a faith that will not falter.



For Further Study: Psalm 27:14; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Matthew 7:7–11



Who is the “I AM” spoken of in the Bible?

“Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM’” (John 8:58).



The Scriptures teach clearly that the great “I AM” is Jesus. Remember when Moses didn’t know how to identify to the Israelites which god had sent him? “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

The phrase “I AM” means that God is the eternal, self-existent One. In conversations with others, we often like to know how old a person is and where they are from. With the Lord, He has always been and is everywhere. He has no beginning and no end. In the book of Revelation, He is spoken of as the “Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6). As the Creator, He is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2).

We can see the connection of this sacred “I AM” name in the Gospels when Christ spoke of Himself saying, “I am the bread” (John 6:35), “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), and “I am the vine” (John 15:5).

The title of “I AM” was so clearly understood by Christ’s enemies that when He used it for Himself, “They took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (John 8:59).

One other interesting reference to the name “I AM” is found at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Notice, “God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me’” (Exodus 20:1–3). Even in God’s law we find Christ exemplified!

Remember how Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Actually, the phrase “keep My commandments” comes right out of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 5:10). There is an obvious connection between Christ, the law, and the name “I AM.”



Jesus, I believe that you have always existed. Since you know the beginning from the end, I put my past, my present, and my future into your hands today.





Is it always wrong to judge others?



*“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?”
(1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).*

We’ve all heard people echo the command, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1, 2). This is not a universal prohibition against ever using practical judgment with other people. Jesus also said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

God is not saying that we aren’t to use judgment to distinguish between right and wrong. Neither is He suggesting we shouldn’t hold each other accountable, or that we can’t help guide another person. The Bible says we should “be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24, 25).

It’s appropriate to condemn a wrong act, but we have no right to condemn a person. And we should always be ready to forgive the one who commits a wrong act, just as our Father in heaven is ready to forgive the offender. Being merciful doesn’t in any way condone the wrong that has been done. Just as God does, we should hate the sin, but love the sinner.

When He says, “Judge not,” God is telling us we’re not to pass sentence on anyone. We should be careful in that regard because when we judge and denounce other people, we’re going to be judged by those standards as well. Paul wrote, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Romans 2:1). Frequently, people who criticize and condemn others are hypocrites and are themselves guilty of the same kind of sin.



Father in heaven, give me a humble heart and help me to see more clearly the faults in myself, so I will be less likely to pass judgment on others. May I always reflect your mercy and forgiveness to others.



For Further Study: Luke 6:37; Romans 2:3



Why can't we judge others?

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).



It's very easy to be a hypocrite, to sharply or unjustly criticize others when you're not living up to your own standards. Jesus warned, "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:4, 5). He's saying it's okay to take the speck out, but make sure you don't have a log in your eye first!

The Bible commands, "He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. . . . Who are you to judge another?" (James 4:11, 12). We should not judge another person's motives because only God can read the heart. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). We can try to guess someone's motives, but we're likely to be wrong.

While we don't know the heart of any person, we should be able to tell whether their actions are in accordance with Scripture. We don't know why a person is doing something, but if it's wrong, maybe in a humble, non-offensive way, we can help and encourage that person and "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness," while at the same time "considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Although Christians should not judge the motives of others now, the Bible tells us a day will come when we will judge the world and even angels. "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5). Sometime after Jesus returns, God will show us the motives of those who are lost—both humans and angels—so that we can know that He has treated them fairly.



Dear Lord, make me aware of the logs in my own eyes! Help me to remember that only you can read human hearts.





Why is it necessary to be “born again” to be saved?



“Most assuredly, ... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

If everyone is already a child of God, is it really necessary to be born again?

The Bible says, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13). This passage says that “to become” children of God, we must believe in His name. The result of accepting Christ as your Savior is being born again.

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless he was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was initially confused by this metaphor, so Christ clarified, “Most assuredly, ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5, 6). The flesh refers to our natural birth, and the Spirit speaks of our spiritual rebirth. We all have been born of the flesh, but not everyone has been born of the Spirit. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:50.)

It’s a fundamental belief in Christianity that we must recognize we are sinners. Seeing that we need Jesus as our Savior, we come to Him, confess our sins, and ask Him to cleanse us and create a new heart within us. God will never force us, so unless we willingly ask Jesus into our hearts, the Lord cannot fully work within us.

In the Bible, we see John the Baptist baptizing people in the waters of the Jordan. The disciples of Christ also baptized. Baptism is a symbol of a new birth—just as when a baby emerges from its protective envelope of water and takes its first breath. This sacred ceremony is the public declaration that we’re on God’s side and have become His children. It’s important for our own spiritual growth and as a witness to others.



Jesus, I confess my need of you. Please forgive me for all my sins and come into my heart. I truly desire to be born again.



For Further Study: Romans 6:23; 3:23; Hebrews 2:8, 9; John 3:16

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What should our response be toward those who leave the church?

*"You shall be called the Repairer of the Breach"
(Isaiah 58:12).*



Imagine everyone knows at least one person who was once walking with Jesus and was enthusiastic about being a Christian, but then he or she stopped attending church.

There are many reasons people stop going. About 2.7 million former church members reported they drifted from church activity due to their lives being too busy, while others said they no longer believed in some of the teachings of the church. But, surprisingly, the vast majority indicated that they simply didn't like the pastor or had a conflict with another member. It happens all too often. Look at these sad statistics:

- Each year 3,500 churches in America close their doors permanently.
- 150,000 people leave churches for good every week.
- 32 percent of people surveyed after leaving church reported that no one from their congregations ever contacted them.

It's unfortunate that anyone has felt ignored, rejected, ostracized, or injured by another church member or group of members. The church should be a loving and safe place, a sanctuary where sinners come to find hope, healing, and spiritual nurturing. But it doesn't always work out that way. People don't always follow the Lord's command to love one another, and often the result is that someone leaves the church.

When Jesus said, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6), He was speaking of these missing members who have drifted away from the church. He was letting us know that we should be especially involved in searching for them. Rather than turning our eyes away from the problem, we should "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

We should search for these people with enthusiasm, like the woman searching for her lost coin (Luke 15:8). Searching is the first step in bringing them home.

Tomorrow we'll look at some specific things we can do to help someone in that situation.



*Father, I am dismayed by the number of people
leaving the church. Forgive me for anything
I might have done to cause their decision.
Help me to be more loving and willing to
reach out to those who have strayed away.*



For Further Study: Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7; 1 Peter 2:25; Isaiah 53:6



How do you help people who have had negative experiences with the church?



*"You shall be called the Repairer of the Breach"
(Isaiah 58:12).*

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells a parable about a missing sheep. In the story, the shepherd searches relentlessly until he finds it. Then he lays it on his shoulders and lovingly carries it back home. The Lord wants us to follow His example and send out search parties to look for the lost sheep among us. These missing sheep are our neighbors, friends, and family who have wandered away from the flock.

Here are some specific ways you can help someone who has left the church:

First, pray for them. God promises, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Prayer is powerful.

Invite them back! The biggest issue facing former members is how to reconnect with the church. They could be waiting for the invitation, so you can be the one to help them find a path back. In some cases, a friendly phone call or visit might be all that is needed. Remember to treat missing members the way you would want to be treated. Offer a warm, no-pressure invitation. Be loving and nonjudgmental, and leave room for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.

We should also "receive one another, just as Christ received us" (Romans 15:7). Be prepared to receive with open arms those who return, as the father received the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). The shepherd in Jesus' story called his friends and neighbors in for a celebration. He told them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

At the end of the parable, Jesus says, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). Shouldn't we feel the same way? Imagine how a person would feel if the entire church turned out to celebrate their return!



*Dear Lord, help me to be as delighted as heaven
is when lost members return. Help me to welcome
them with the warmth and love of Jesus.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 22:39; Matthew 7:12; James 5:16
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible say how the different human races came to be?

“He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26).



First, there is but one human race. We’re all a little different, sure—but we’re all one race.

All the genetic material for human diversity were within Adam and Eve. As mankind dispersed after the Tower of Babel, people intermarried within tribes and certain distinctive traits—like pigment levels—became dominant. (This development shouldn’t be confused with Darwinism.) Some people speculate that Noah’s three sons were the heads of three major races, but I don’t agree with that.

A good analogy is all the different types of dogs that we see in the world today. There is a mind-boggling variety in size, shape, color, type of hair, and temperament. What is amazing about all these dogs—Great Danes, Chihuahuas, Australian Cattle Dogs, Cocker Spaniels, coyotes, and more—is that they can trace their DNA back to two original wolf-like dogs.

One human example of this process is looking at different people who live in the Pacific Islands. After generations of living in virtual isolation from other islanders, Samoans and people from Fiji have developed their own distinct features. It’s something beautiful to appreciate!

Though there are many different “races” of people on the earth, the Bible teaches that we are all “one blood.” If I need a blood transfusion, hospital personnel don’t need to check which race the blood came from, just the blood type. We obviously all came from the same parents. There is no superior race either. We are all children of Adam and Eve and created by God.

Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). No matter our “race,” we all stand on equal ground before the cross. We all have the same opportunity to receive the free gift of salvation.



Thank you, Lord, for creating the beautiful diversity we find in the world. May I remember today that each person I meet is unique and special in your eyes.





What does the Bible mean when it says we should not be lukewarm, but rather hot or cold?



“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15, 16).

Jesus’ message to the Laodicean church is where we find this verse. Laodicea was a wealthy city in Asia Minor, and, unlike the nearby cities of Heirapolis (known for its hot springs) or Collasae (known for its fresh cold water), it had to pipe in water through a long aqueduct. By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm and distasteful.

Jesus described the works of Laodicea as neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. God detests its mediocrity because the church had opportunity to recognize its condition.

“You do not know,” marked Laodicea. This church felt it was rich and needed nothing. It was in a prominent banking center known for its self-sufficiency. When an earthquake destroyed the city, it refused assistance from the emperor to rebuild. To its wealthy church, Jesus said, “You do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (v. 17)—strong language for a proud city. Instead, Christ offers them gold refined in fire, the pure gold of faith.

Jesus also calls Laodicea, known for its textiles, “naked” and offers them the white garments of His righteousness. And though the city was known for a medical school that sold special eye ointment, the Lord says they are “blind” and need His eye salve to see.

Yet Jesus loves this church. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (v. 19). The root word for zealous (zeal) means “hot.”

Being hot means being fervent about our relationship with God. Being cold describes a humble condition in which we recognize our weakness. Jesus can bless either of these attitudes, but not pride and self-sufficiency. The Lord wants this church to be on fire—“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in” (v. 20).



*Lord, I pray that today I will have zeal for you.
I accept your gifts of clothing, eye salve, and
gold that make me rich in your righteousness.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 1:18; 42:16; Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Peter 1:7



Should a Christian ever file bankruptcy?

"Owe no one anything except to love one another"
(Romans 13:8).



When people invest in a business, always doing their best, but the business fails, I don't believe it's a sin. The creditor knew the risk. Likewise, if you borrow money with the best intentions of paying it back, and due to circumstances such as unexpected catastrophic medical bills, it's not a sin to find relief.

But suppose you borrow money promising you'll pay it back, but when you have a way to repay, in whole or in part, you decide to spend it on something nonessential. In that case, you'd be stealing. God evaluates sin based on a person's heart. (See 1 Samuel 16:7.)

There are several types of bankruptcy. One kind actually buys you time to reorganize your business so you can pay your debts, holding creditors back awhile. And there's a form of bankruptcy that basically wipes out all your debt. Another type has you pay back a portion of the debt based on your assets and income at the time.

People who have lost a spouse to tragedy are often left with tremendous debt. Sometimes the only way they're ever going to see the light of day is by taking advantage of the legal means to remove those debts. In Bible times, every 50th year was a Jubilee, during which most debts were wiped out (see Leviticus 25:9–14).

A woman once came to the prophet Elijah and said, "Your servant my husband is dead. . . . And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves" (2 Kings 4:1). Elijah didn't tell her not to pay her debt; instead, he performed a miracle to make it possible for her to pay it (2 Kings 4:2–7).

As Christians, we can be the best witnesses by always honoring our debts. Sometimes the economy turns upside-down, or other drastic circumstances arise, and people need to file bankruptcy to survive. But I personally could not rest easy if I owed a debt but chose not to pay it. Yes, it can take years to pay off credit cards and dig ourselves out, but paying back just debts is a Christian responsibility.



Dear God, help me to be honest in all my financial matters. Help me to strive to be the best kind of witness for you.





Was Jesus human or divine when He was on this earth?



“[Jesus], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:6–8).

Some find it difficult to harmonize the idea that Jesus was both human and divine. “If Christ was human, then how could He “see” Nathaniel praying under a fig tree?” (John 1:46–49). Yet the Bible is full of statements that emphasize the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. Our Savior was 100-percent human and 100-percent divine, fully God and fully a man.

While Christ was on earth, He obviously did not have all the infinite knowledge of God swirling around in His head. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He grew in the natural course of human beings, both physically, mentally, and spiritually (Luke 2:52). Early on in His life, we see Him beginning to grasp His divine mission (v.49).

As we study the life of Jesus, we see both His human nature and divine nature revealed. Jesus walked with the disciples, He ate food, and slept as we sleep. Yet we also see moments when His divinity flashed through, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). Apparently, our Lord had access to divine knowledge and power when it was needed.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). John describes Christ by stating, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He later quotes Jesus saying, “O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (17:5). Jesus limited Himself in many ways in order to identify with us, yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). That is why He is our Lord and Savior!



Lord, thank you for coming to this earth and identifying yourself with humanity. Through your life I may more clearly know God the Father.



For Further Study: John 8:58; Luke 5:20–24; 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



How could Jesus have been in the tomb for “three days and three nights”?

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).



This is a frequently asked question in connection with this familiar text. Because of a simple misunderstanding, this particular passage in Matthew has managed to cause confusion, frustration, and even division among laypersons, clergy, and scholars alike. I will actually take a few days to cover this popular “three days and three nights” conundrum regarding the story of Jonah.

Jesus says that the Son of Man will “be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”—meaning in the tomb. We’ll assume, as commonly believed, that Jesus died Friday and rose Sunday. Noting this, no matter how you cut it, Jesus was not in the tomb for three nights—even though Scripture distinctly states “three nights.”

Many people feel that the Bible just can’t be trusted because of this supposed discrepancy. And others attempt to accommodate the “three nights” verse by adopting the belief that Jesus died on Wednesday or Thursday. Still others reason that Jesus did not mean three literal nights.

Church history reveals a similar “right time, wrong place” misinterpretation of Scripture. William Miller, a godly Baptist preacher in the 1800s, believed and taught that Jesus would return in 1844. He wrongly interpreted Daniel 8:14, thinking that the sanctuary to be cleansed was the earth. Miller had the right time for this event, but the wrong event! Fortunately, Bible students dug deeper into the Scriptures to clear up this misunderstanding.

Frankly, it’s very sad to see Christians expend so much energy struggling to explain something that the Bible clearly explains itself! The problem is not in “the three days and three nights” at all. The problem springs from our misunderstanding of the phrase “in the heart of the earth.” I’ll first address this issue and then explain what “heart of the earth” means.



Lord, may I always turn to your Word for answers to my questions. Help me trust that the Scriptures are like a solid rock on which I can stand and be secure.





What does “in the heart of the earth” mean in Matthew 12:40?



“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

Whenever we attempt to gather the meaning of a Scripture passage, we must compare it with other similar or related passages. This allows the Bible to interpret itself. Since the term “heart of the earth” is found only in Matthew 12, we need to find similar verses to reference.

The phrase “in the earth” appears 66 times in the King James, but none of these refers to the grave. For instance, in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus says, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” Does this mean we’re praying for God’s will to be done in the tomb as it is in heaven? Of course not! Rather, it means His will be done among the nations of the earth.

In the second commandment, we read, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4 KJV). We recognize here that “in the earth beneath” does not mean the grave, but rather “in the world.”

In Matthew 12:40, the word “heart” comes from the Greek word *kardia*, which is where we get the word “cardiac.” According to *Strong’s*, *kardia* means the heart, thoughts, or feelings; it also can mean the middle. Additionally, the Greek word for “earth” is *ge*, which literally means soil, a region, or the solid part or whole of the globe.

So the phrase “in the heart of the earth” can easily be translated as “in the midst of the world”—or in the grip of this lost planet—that Jesus came to save! In other words, in Matthew 12:40, the Lord is telling His disciples that just as Jonah was in the belly of a great fish, so the Son of Man would be in the heart of the world.



Thank you, Jesus, for choosing to step into the clutches of the world, that you might bring salvation to the entire world.



For Further Study: Genesis 6:5; 2 Samuel 14:20; Psalm 46:10



How could Jesus have been in the tomb for “three days and three nights”?

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).



When exactly were the sins of the world placed upon the Lamb of God? Was it when He died on the cross, or when they laid His body in the grave? The answer is neither.

According to Hebrew law, the sins of the people were placed upon the Passover lamb before it was slain. During the Last Supper, with the bread and grape juice, Jesus sealed His new covenant to be the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered” (John 18:1). Jesus went through the Jordan when He began His ministry, and He crossed the Kidron when He began His sufferings.

Then in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed an intense prayer of surrender three times. On that Thursday evening, He prayed in agony, sweating drops of blood. He said, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42–44). From that moment on, Christ had sealed His surrender, fulfilling His destiny as the guilt-bearer for the fallen race.

Jesus was now fully a captive of the devil. For the first time in eternity, communion between the Father and the Son was interrupted. He was in “the heart of the earth,” or more clearly, “the depths of the world.” Just as with Jonah, there appeared to be a total, hopeless darkness that surrounded the world’s Redeemer.

There are five Bible verses in which Jesus refers to this Thursday evening as “the hour,” meaning a pivotal transition time in His ministry: Matthew 26:45; Mark 14:41; Luke 22:14; John 16:32; and John 17:1. Each of these affirms that Christ entered a deep darkness in order to bring light to you and me!



Dear Jesus, I am amazed at the love you extended to our dark world. You freely chose to carry my sins in order to set me free from the clutches of the devil. Thank you!





How could Jesus have been in the tomb for “three days and three nights”?



“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

A distinct change took place the hour Christ was betrayed into the “hands of sinners”—or we might better say, “into the hands of the devil.” Before this point in Jesus’ ministry, every time a mob tried to capture Him or stone Him or hurl Him off a cliff, He passed through unharmed. He slipped right through their fingers. His hour had not yet come. But after that hour—Thursday evening—when the past, present, and future sins of the world were placed upon the Lamb of God, that changed.

We forget that the penalty for sin is not just death; there is also punishment or suffering that is measured out according to our works. Jesus came to take our total penalty, the suffering and the death. When exactly did He begin to bear the sins of the world? It began Thursday evening in Gethsemane!

From the moment He began bearing the penalty for our sins, Jesus was in the heart of the earth, the headquarters of hell. Soldiers beat Him. The crowds spat on Him. He was dragged from one trial to another—from the high priest to Pilate, from Herod back to Pilate, and then finally to Golgotha. He was in the clutches of the devil, the prince of this evil world (John 16:11).

So as we look again at Matthew 12:40, keep in mind that Jesus did not necessarily mean it would be three 24-hour segments, but rather, the suffering to end all sufferings would occur over a period of three days and three nights. Jesus was “in the heart of the earth,” or in the grip of the enemy, over a period of three days and three nights—Thursday night (captured and tried), Friday night (crucified and killed), Saturday night (held dead in the grave). And then, praise the Lord, He rose on Sunday morning.



Thank you, dear Jesus, for taking the punishment for my sins. I receive your free gift of salvation, purchased at the cost of your life.



For Further Study: Luke 12:47; 2 Peter 2:9; Romans 6:23

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Do Christians need to tithe?

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’” (Malachi 3:10).



The New Testament says very little about tithe, but it also does not condemn or cancel it. Tithing is a system that God employed to support the ministry of His Word. Both Abraham and Jacob practiced tithing, meaning the practice predates the time of Moses (see Genesis 14:20; Genesis 28:22). Later, when the Jews neglected tithing, the people backslid because the priests were unable to teach them.

I believe ministers still need to be sustained by the tithe so they can focus on teaching. I’m a pastor, and I work all through the week—from performing funerals and weddings, visiting the sick, counseling, and preaching to the lost. If I had to work another full-time job, I could not effectively minister as I do. So I believe God also designed the tithe for today.

Christ mentions tithing just once, in reference to how hypocrites pay their tithe but omit weightier matters of the law and love. “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matthew 23:23). Do not leave tithing undone—that’s a pretty clear statement from Jesus!

The apostle Paul adds, “You should not muzzle the ox that treads the grain” (1 Timothy 5:18). He appeals to Old Testament laws in connection with tithing, even though he doesn’t explicitly call it tithing, saying, “Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). It seems this Old Testament principle is still intact.

Finally, I believe that God still opens up the windows of heaven. When I first came to Jesus, everything I owned fit into a backpack. When I started paying tithe, even on my meager income, the Lord blessed my family! I’ve seen countless miracles in the lives of people who claim the promises of tithing; they’re still available today. “Prove me now,” says the Lord, and He’ll bless you.



*Dear God, thank you for the privilege of
returning a small portion of my income to
acknowledge that you are Lord of all in my life.*





What is the proper posture for prayer? Is it always necessary to kneel?



“When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:5).

In my opinion, kneeling is the best posture for formal and personal prayer. Our body language says something about how we respect God. But the Scriptures are filled with examples of people praying in various positions. God hears us when we pray, whether we are swimming, driving, or lying down.

Most examples of prayer in the Bible involve kneeling, sometimes even full prostration on the ground (Ezra 9:5, 6). This indicates a spirit of deep humility before God. The Christian practice of bowing one’s head in prayer might be linked to Exodus 12:27: “The people bowed their heads and worshiped.” And in the story of the publican in Luke 18, Jesus says, “The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

Solomon knelt when he first prayed at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:54), and then he stood when he gave the benediction and blessed the people (v. 55). If your church is standing during an invocation, but is kneeling at some other time in the service, I wouldn’t create a spectacle by kneeling when everyone else is standing. This would draw too much attention to you and would be very distracting to the other worshipers.

Still, God doesn’t want us to be ritualistic like the Pharisees either. The attitude and posture of our heart is the most crucial element, and though ideally there should be a kneeling prayer some time during the service, simply bowing one’s head can also indicate a spirit of humility. “Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:6).



Lord, may my posture in prayer always reflect a humble heart that honors you. And may my day be filled with ongoing communication with heaven.



For Further Study: Matthew 6:5–15; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Nehemiah 2:4

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Will the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem before Jesus returns?

“Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple” (Matthew 12:6).



With the constant turmoil threatening stability in the Middle East, many Bible commentators are always speculating about whether the Jewish temple will be rebuilt in the years to come. Entire Christian ministries are established to assist in the building of the temple to hasten the return of Jesus. For many, such an event will signal the start of the final events of earth's history.

However, in the same way many Christians mistakenly shift the focus from spiritual Israel to the literal Jewish nation, they are also confused on the subject of the temple. Most speculation for a rebuilt temple springs from a vague reference in 2 Thessalonians 2 dealing with the antichrist: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (vv. 3, 4).

Many say that for the antichrist to sit in the temple, it will need to be rebuilt. Those who support this belief are known as “Christian Zionists,” and they include such popular writers as Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and John Hagee. Their published book sales exceed 70 million copies—including the popular *Left Behind* series. Their beliefs are endorsed by some of the largest theological institutions.

But are they correct? To begin, let's go to 1 Chronicles 17:11, 12: “When your days are fulfilled . . . I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever.” This prophecy given to King David says his offspring will build the temple.

This text is one of the clearest examples of a dual prophecy found in Scripture. In tomorrow's devotional, we'll explore more what this means.



Dear Lord, I invite you into the temple of my heart. I long for your presence to be within me that my life might reflect your glory.





Will the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem before Jesus returns?



"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).

Dual prophecies have both a physical and spiritual fulfillment. As we read yesterday, Solomon, the son of David, built the physical temple. But this prophecy also applies spiritually to Jesus, the true "Son of David," who is to build a temple and kingdom that will last forever.

Jesus' prophecy that the temple would be destroyed inspired the most intense rejection of His teachings. (See Matthew 24:1, 2.) In Mark 14:58, Jesus says, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Of course, Jesus is speaking of rebuilding a temple not of stone, but of flesh. Many refused this teaching (John 2:20, 21) and even mocked Jesus for it while He was on the cross (Matthew 27:40).

Yet when Jesus died, the veil in the earthly temple ripped in two from the top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), signifying that the temple no longer held meaning. A temple for sacrifice today would be useless, and it would not be the house of God.

The New Testament consistently presents the idea that the temple is the body of Jesus. Ephesians 2:19–22 says, "You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Even after God provides all this evidence that His temple is a spiritual one, many Christians are waiting for the Jews to receive a construction permit to rebuild a temple on the site where a Muslim mosque now sits. However, there is no prophecy, promise, or commandment that says the physical temple would ever be rebuilt after the Romans razed it nearly 2,000 years ago.



*Dear God, I open my heart to receive you. May
your Spirit reside in the temple of my heart.
May your glory shine through my life.*



For Further Study: 1 Peter 2:5; Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:9–17

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible talk about dinosaurs?

“Look now at the behemoth ... he eats grass like an ox. See now, his strength is in his hips, and his power is in his stomach muscles. He moves his tail like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are tightly knit. His bones are like beams of bronze, his ribs like bars of iron. He is the first of the ways of God; only He who made him can bring near His sword” (Job 40:15–19).



We know there were dinosaurs roaming the earth before the flood. There were not only giant reptiles, but also giant mammals. For example, there’s a fossilized skeleton of a beaver 13 feet tall!

Noah was told to take pairs of most of the animal kinds onto the ark. In respect to dinosaurs, he wouldn’t have had to take a full-grown triceratops; he could have even taken the eggs. But he probably took a sample of all the major species on earth at that time.

After the flood, it’s likely that a lot of animals became extinct because the environment changed so much. And there were people like Nimrod, “the mighty hunter before the LORD” (Genesis 10:9). Anything as big as a Tyrannosaurus Rex was probably a threat, and it’s likely that the people of that time hunted them down and rendered them extinct before too long.

“Dinosaur” is a relatively modern name. The Bible does mention a beast that could very well have been a dinosaur. The “behemoth” mentioned in Job was evidently a massive beast that ate vegetation and had a “tail like a cedar” (Job 40:17). Scripture also describes this creature as living near water and being quite fearless. We don’t have anything that meets that description living on earth now.

The book of Job also speaks of a sea creature called “leviathan.” In the book of Isaiah, “Leviathan” is referred to as a “twisted serpent” and “the reptile that is in the sea” (27:1). We know some dinosaurs were ocean dwellers, and it’s possible that this refers to a type of dinosaur as well.



Dear Lord, thank you for the variety of creatures you have made. Though we don’t have all the answers about the dinosaurs, we know you do, and we thank you that Scripture gives us some interesting clues on this subject.





Is it necessary to pray “In Jesus’ name” at the end of every prayer?



“Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

Jesus actually commands us to pray in His name. He says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16:23). This doesn’t mean, however, that just saying His name has some kind of magical power.

Suppose I go to a complete stranger asking for a favor. They’re not likely to listen to my request. But if I bring them a letter from their best friend, someone they love, and it’s signed by their best friend—well, that could make a big difference. I say to them, “Look, I’ve come in the name of Henry, and here’s a letter from Henry, signed by him. Can you help me with this problem?” If they love Henry, and I’m coming in Henry’s name, they will listen to me.

Jesus told us, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). When we come to the Father, we come in the name of the Lord Jesus and say, “Please, hear my prayer. Not because I deserve it. I’ve been alienated from you by sin. But because of your love for your Son, please honor my request for His sake.” That’s really what it means to pray in Jesus’ name. It can also mean to pray with the mind and the spirit of Christ and with the same attitude that Jesus had.

Of course, the Father loves us too; He wants us to come to Him. That’s why He sent Jesus to bridge the gap. Jesus said, “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (John 16:26, 27).



Dear Father, thank you for providing a way for us to come to you. Thank you for loving us and for listening to our prayers. In Jesus’ name, amen.



For Further Study: Colossians 3:17; Acts 4:12; John 16:24



What is the unpardonable sin?

"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32).



In Matthew 12:31, 32, Jesus gives us a very solemn warning about a specific kind of sin. This sin is commonly known as the "unpardonable sin." This statement from Jesus has caused all kinds of confusion, and many who don't know what this sin is live in fear that they've committed it. But others don't know how close they've come to this disastrous act. Let's take a few moments to clear this up.

In the Greek, the word is *blasphemos*, and according to one dictionary, it means "to vilify, to speak impiously, to defame, to rail upon, to revile, to speak evil, to hurt or blast the reputation, nature or works of God." To call God foul names and to besmirch His Son's saving grace are certainly forms of blasphemy.

Additionally, in John 10:33, we read that some leaders in Israel were trying to find a reason to stone Jesus. "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.'" These men accused Jesus of blasphemy when He claimed equality with God and the right to forgive sin. Of course, they would have been correct to do so if Jesus were not God.

But blasphemy itself is not the unpardonable sin. In 1 Timothy 1:13, the apostle Paul writes: "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." We know Paul will be in heaven even though he was a blasphemer. God's grace to us is exceedingly abundant; it forgives even blasphemy. Remember, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men." God's grace is amazing!

Tomorrow, we'll look more specifically at blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. For now, ask yourself, "Do I honor the Lord with my words? Does my life show respect for God?"



Dear Father in heaven, may my words and behavior today show reverence for your name and your Spirit.





What is the unpardonable sin?



“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men” (Matthew 12:31).

So what about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit . . . is it unforgivable? Well, to answer this, we need to understand what the Holy Spirit does. Once we do that, we'll see why His function is so crucial that blasphemy against Him is such a serious sin that it cannot be forgiven.

The Holy Spirit does three things: First, He teaches us the things we need to know for our salvation (John 14:26). Second, the Spirit guides us into all truth (John 16:13). Third, the mission of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin (John 16:7,8).

This is His work. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that as long as we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, to guide us, and to convict us, we could never be guilty of committing the unpardonable sin. But suppose we refuse to acknowledge these three works of the Spirit in our personal experience with God; that is exactly when people begin to approach the deadly parameters of the worst sin on record.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a perpetual, constant resisting of the drawing love of God's Spirit, so much so that you lose the capacity to hear the Spirit's voice. The conscience becomes seared (1 Timothy 4:2). This deadly blasphemy is also called “grieving away” the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit, wherewith you are sealed,” meaning we can permanently grieve Him away.

Eventually, a person loses the capacity to repent and, therefore, cannot be saved. It is for this sin that a person cannot be forgiven, because they have rejected the Spirit that convicts of sin (John 16:8). So if you still feel convicted of sin and have the desire to repent, then you have probably not committed the unpardonable sin.



*Dear Lord, may your Spirit daily convict me of sin.
May my heart always respond to the promptings of
your voice to my heart. May I never turn from you.*



For Further Study: Mark 3:28–30; Matthew 11:24, 28, 32; 1 John 5:16, 17

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does the Bible say about divorce?

*“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”
(Matthew 19:9).*



Divorce came into the world only because of sin. It was never meant to be part of the human experience. God intended that a man and woman in marriage become so closely united in purpose, being, and existence that they are literally “one flesh.” And two lives so intertwined cannot be divided without causing great pain and emotional scarring.

Sadly, the plague of divorce is now so common in our society that it’s doubtful there is a soul in America who hasn’t been impacted by it one way or another. Perhaps you’ve been through it yourself . . . or perhaps a friend, parent, or child of yours.

The statistics are terrible enough: Between 40 and 50 percent of all first marriages end in divorce. That means almost half the people who get married will, sooner or later, divorce. What’s worse is that 67 percent of second marriages will end up in divorce too. Perhaps third marriages are charmed? Not at all, as about 74 percent of those go down the tubes as well. Indeed, about 25 percent of adults in America are divorced.

Meanwhile, more than one million children each year in America experience the breakup of their parents. *One million!* Only God knows the very real heartache, the suffering, and the trauma experienced by those who are directly impacted by divorce.

When the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question about divorce, He talked about how a man and his wife become one flesh and how man should not separate what God has joined together (see Matthew 19:4–6). He further explained: “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (verse 9).

Now, if this were the only statement in the Bible regarding marriage, it would seem that, according to Jesus, there is just one biblical ground for divorcing and then remarrying. Of course, the Bible and Jesus have more to say on marriage than just this passage.



God, please give me understanding and wisdom as I consider what your Word teaches about marriage and divorce.





What does the Bible say about divorce?



*“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”
(Matthew 19:9).*

However strict the above passage appears, it simply shows how sacrosanct marriage is supposed to be and why a couple, a church community, and even nations are under a divine obligation to protect the institution of marriage.

While God hates divorce, there is a time or two in the Bible when He actually commands it. Whenever someone got married to a person whom they later discovered was still legally married to another, they were to end the marriage.

Another valid reason for divorce is abandonment by an unbelieving partner, as when a non-Christian spouse walks away from a marriage. The Bible says, “If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Corinthians 7:15).

We touched on the third reason yesterday. If a person is married and his or her spouse violates their marriage vows, that person has “biblical grounds” for divorce; it is permissible by Bible standards. According to Scripture, the innocent party may re-marry, but the guilty party may not as long as the ex-spouse remains unmarried and chaste. To do so would be to commit adultery again. (See Luke 16:18.)

Although adultery gives the offended spouse the right to divorce, it doesn’t mean he or she must do so. Many marriages damaged by unfaithfulness have been salvaged, and many couples would do themselves and their kids a big favor to try to make the marriage work despite the pain of infidelity.

Regardless of how scrambled your nuptial history might be, Jesus promises, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). We all are sinful and in need of mercy. We should be careful not to judge others who are divorced. And if we have been divorced against biblical principles, there is forgiveness for us too. God offers healing, grace, and comfort to those who have been traumatized by divorce.



*Dear Lord, help us be merciful toward others,
and thank you that your grace and mercy
thrive where forgiveness is not deserved.*



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 7:10–16; Romans 7:2; Mark 10:11, 12; 1 John 1:9
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does it mean that if we sin willfully, there no longer remains a sacrifice for us?

"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" (Hebrews 10:26, 27).



The word "sin" in this verse refers to something ongoing as opposed to one event. If a person continues to sin after receiving knowledge of the truth, there's nothing more God can do. We've been created with free choice, and God doesn't force His will on anyone. If we persist and cling to a life of sinning, over time our hearts will harden to God's voice.

Matthew 12:31 says, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men." This is talking about a continual rejection of God's Spirit, leading to the unpardonable sin. This is a gradual process; it doesn't happen overnight. If the Holy Spirit convicts a person, and that person continually rejects that conviction, eventually he will reach the point where he can't hear the promptings of the Spirit any longer.

Obviously, sometimes we fall; it's not premeditated and we don't want to disappoint the Lord. But there is intentional sin when a person says, "I want to do what the world does, and I'm just going to hope God saves me." If we expect God to save us even though we follow our fleshly desires, we're only fooling ourselves. Paul says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption" (Galatians 6:7, 8).

There's no person on earth who hasn't sinned willfully at least once. If everyone who willfully sins one time is doomed, then we're all doomed. But we know it's not just one sin that separates us from the sacrifice of Christ. It's a continual rebellion. And what more can God do to save us if we reject His grace and power to have a victorious life?



Lord, keep me from the self-destructive pattern of willful sinning. Take my heart and empower me to live for you, that I may reap everlasting life.





Once you are saved, can you ever lose your salvation?



"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

There are many examples in the Bible of people who had a saving relationship with God and were filled with the Spirit, but then they turned away ... such as King Saul and Judas. Jesus will never let go of us, but we can let go of Him. We always have that freedom.

The concept that once you are saved you can never be lost is unbiblical. People sometimes turn from God after following Him for a time. Peter puts it like this: "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'" (2 Peter 2:22).

On the other extreme, some people believe that you need to walk every day in doubt of your relationship with the Lord. Yet the Bible is clear that we can walk in assurance. Paul writes, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Another verse says, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

According to the Bible, the notion that once a person is saved he cannot be lost is just not true. One of the clearest verses in Scripture states:

"When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die" (Ezekiel 18:24).

In other words, a person who was righteous can turn away from God and be lost. If a person is saved and cannot lose his salvation, why would he need to "hold fast" and not waver according to Hebrews 10:23? Because God has given people the freedom of choice.



Thank you, Jesus, for giving me the freedom to choose or reject you. Today I invite you into my heart as Lord and Savior.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2; Hebrews 4:4–7; Revelation 3:5



Once you are saved, can you ever lose your salvation?

"I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).



As we consider the false aspects of "once saved, always saved," we should remember that while Jesus will never let go of us, we can let go of Him. The danger of the teaching that once you are saved you cannot be lost is that it takes away our free will. We're always free to choose to love or reject the Lord. God does not take away our freedom once we accept Him.

Notice this example in the writings of the apostle Paul:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

Paul was saying that even as an apostle of Jesus, he could lose his salvation. That's why Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Notice how some respond: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (vv. 22, 23).

Those who come to Christ and join the church do not necessarily continue on the pathway to heaven. Some who confess Jesus and even do great works in the name of Christ will be lost. Making a profession, such as, "I am saved," does not guarantee a genuine, living relationship with Jesus.



*Lord Jesus, today I choose you as my Savior.
I want to abide in you all day long. I want
to know you and love you more deeply.*





Once you are saved, can you ever lose your salvation?



“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

As we continue looking at the topic of salvation, I want to highlight that God does not want us to live in fear. John writes, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

As long as we abide in Christ, we have nothing to fear. But when we take our hand out of His hand and we choose to turn from His will and go our own way, then we lose this assurance. But as long as we are placing our lives in the hands of the Almighty, we don’t have to live in fear and doubt. God doesn’t want us to have that kind of experience.

I believe that it’s important for us to daily rededicate our lives to the Lord. That doesn’t mean that we’re lost every day. Paul said, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). What he means by that is, “I choose every day to die to self and be born again unto God.” On a daily basis we rededicate ourselves to God. That doesn’t mean you’re lost and saved and lost and saved . . . as if you’re on a spiritual roller coaster. Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). We live on the basis of daily trusting in the Lord.

Some Christians do advocate the doctrine of eternal security. The Bible teaches that God leaves the door open for us to change our minds at any time. Salvation is not based upon only one irrevocable act or choice of the past, but upon a continuous, personal relationship of the believer with Christ. When the decision to break the love relationship is made by willful disobedience, the believer ceases to be a true believer and forfeits any assurance of salvation.



Lord, thank you for the assurance in eternal life I have in Jesus. I rededicate my life to you this day and every day. I am safe in your hands.



For Further Study: Hebrews 10:38; Matthew 24:13

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Is it possible for the devil to repent?

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:14–16).



There’s no record of Christ offering to die for the fallen angels. But God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6)—it’s just His nature—and I think He bore long with them. There was some kind of probation and mercy extended to Lucifer when he was first entering into his rebellion.

The Scripture says, “He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). There’s a reason for the difference. Satan and his angels were created perfect. They were not deceived in the way that humans were deceived. Lucifer entered a high-handed rebellion into deception. He was made perfect but chose to be proud and to worship himself; whereas Adam and Eve were made in innocence and they were caught off guard by this rebellious fiend. So the devil was more culpable than humanity was. That’s why the Lord had mercy on humans and became one of us in order to save us.

We know from the biblical account that before he sinned, Satan was known as Lucifer and stood in the very presence of God (see Isaiah 14:12). He was closest to the throne of God, and there wasn’t anything more that God could do to reveal His character to him. On the other hand, Adam and Eve were not in that same position. I believe that God gave Lucifer and the angels who believed his lies plenty of opportunity to realize the errors of their way. After all, God is a God of justice, and He’s not willing that any of His creatures should perish.



Dear God, we praise you for your kindness toward us. Thank you for your great mercy in sending Christ to save us!





What does it mean to eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood?



"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

Obviously, when Jesus told His disciples they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, He was not talking about cannibalism. Jesus said, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:32, 33). He was offering Himself as spiritual food that we might eat and live.

During the Last Supper, Jesus gave His disciples bread and said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matthew 26:26). He next gave them grape juice and said, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" (verse 28). He was essentially explaining, "Unless you take Me personally into your life—My teachings, My example—and it becomes part of you, then you cannot have eternal life." We need to invite Christ's Spirit into us.

We obtain spiritual food from the Word of God. It doesn't matter how hungry I am; I can't have someone else eat it for me. Eating is something everyone must do for himself. Likewise, we must personally get to know Jesus through the study of His Word, the bread. He comes to life in us through His Word; His Word quickens our minds and our spirits. In the way physical food gives us energy, spiritual food gives us spiritual energy. It sustains us.

Another form of spiritual nourishment is found in the story of the woman at the well. Jesus' disciples brought Him some food and He said, "I have food to eat of which you do not know" (John 4:32). The disciples wondered, "Where did He get food?" He said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (verse 34). So when we do the will of Christ, we're feeding our souls.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we embrace the gospel anew, the new covenant that Christ made with us, and the life and teachings that represent the body and the blood of Jesus.



Father, thank you for the flesh and blood of Jesus given in sacrifice for me, so that I may have eternal life.



For Further Study: Luke 22:19–21; Mark 14:21–23



Does the story of the rich man and Lazarus teach that when we die, we go directly to heaven or hell?

“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22, 23).



Jesus’ story about the rich man and Lazarus is either literally true or it is a mere parable. Here are four reasons why it probably should not be taken literally:

1. The beggar died and was taken by angels to Abraham’s bosom. No one believes that Abraham’s literal bosom is the abode of the righteous dead. It is figurative.
2. Heaven and hell are separated by a gulf, yet the persons depicted here converse with each other. Few theologians believe this could be literally true (Luke 16:26).
3. The rich man was in hell with a body. He had eyes, a tongue, etc. (Luke 16:24). How did his body get into hellfire? No one teaches that the bodies of the wicked go into hell as soon as they die.
4. The request for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come through the flames to cool the rich man’s tongue is obviously not literal. How much moisture would be left, and how much relief would it give?

The rich man undoubtedly represented the Jews in this parable because only a Jew would pray to “father Abraham.” The beggar symbolized the Gentiles, who were counted unworthy to receive the truth. In Matthew 15:27, the Canaanite woman acknowledged that her people were beggars at the table of the Jews.

Christ might have chosen the name of Lazarus because later He would actually raise Lazarus from the dead. The main point of the parable is found in verse 31: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” That’s just what happened. The Jewish leaders didn’t believe even when one named Lazarus was raised before them.



Thank you, Jesus, for using stories to teach truth. I believe that you can raise the dead, and I look forward to the resurrection.



For Further Study: Matthew 24:30, 31

Scan for more on this topic. ►





How can you know for sure which religion is the right one?



“The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

There are a lot of religions out there. Assuming you believe in the Bible, you’ve accepted Christianity. But how do you know which church is right?—after all, there are so many denominations!

There are many good churches, and I believe there are good Christians in every church. I believe the majority of the saved are not in my denomination, but that doesn’t mean I believe every church is right. I also believe there is only one truth, and that’s what we should base our decision on. But again, there are Christian people who love the Lord and are following the light they have in every persuasion.

In selecting a church, there should always be an ongoing search for truth, and the Bible needs to be the foundation. In Revelation 12, you read about the bride of Christ, and the Bible lists several criteria. It identifies some of the important characteristics of God’s church in the last days.

The most outstanding characteristic is found in the last verse of that chapter. That verse says that the dragon, which represents the devil, is angry with the woman. We know this woman, the bride of Christ, represents God’s church; she is clothed with light. Remember that Jesus said to His followers, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). Furthermore, in both the Old and the New Testaments a woman is a symbol of God’s people.

As the Scripture continues, the dragon goes “to make war with the rest of her offspring” (verse 17). Now, here are their characteristics: These people “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The Bible explains that last phrase: “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). So the two outstanding characteristics of God’s people in the last days are that they keep God’s Ten Commandments and they have the spirit of prophecy.



Father in heaven, thank you for the truth given in your Word. Guide us to an intelligent and wise decision regarding your true church.



For Further Study: Revelation 12:1; Revelation 14; Exodus 20:11

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Must you be baptized to be saved? What about the thief on the cross?

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).



God has a plan that can totally wash away all your sins and supercharge your character. Christ says, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

When you accept Christ, the old life dies and the Lord promises to forget all your sins! Not only that, He can help you overcome every sinful habit in your life. Did you know the cross is mentioned 28 times in the Bible, but baptism is mentioned 97 times? It must be pretty important then, and no wonder, because it signifies a new life with the haunting, sinful past buried forever.

“But what about the thief on the cross? He was not baptized, so why should I be?” It’s true: The thief on the cross was never baptized, yet Christ assured him of eternal life. It’s also true that the thief never restored what he stole, according to Ezekiel 33:15. I believe God holds us accountable for what we can do, but He also recognizes our limitations, that we are “dust” (see Psalm 103:14).

I think if the thief could have come down from the cross, he would immediately have been baptized. If you study all the Scripture on baptism, this is the only exception. It seems God wants us to do everything in our power to be baptized, publically showing our faith in the work of Christ in our lives. But for those in highly unusual circumstances, the Lord still provides us assurance of His love.

If you genuinely love Jesus, you will want to follow His example. He was baptized by immersion (Mark 1:9, 10). If you want to prepare your heart for baptism, learn about God’s requirements (Matthew 28:19, 20), believe the truth of God’s Word (Mark 16:16), and turn away from your sins and experience genuine conversion (Acts 2:38).



Lord, you have given me an example of baptism. I choose to follow you all the way and give my heart completely to you.





Did the witch of Endor really conjure up the spirit of Samuel the prophet?



"Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her" (1 Samuel 28:7).

At initial glance, this can appear to be a confusing passage, but with a little detective work, things soon make sense.

First, does the devil—or even witches—have the power to resurrect the dead? Obviously not! Only God can create and animate life. Second, this "Samuel" asks King Saul, "Why did you bring me up?" If Samuel was in heaven, he wouldn't have "come up"; he would've come down.

The Bible is clear that Saul was not speaking to Samuel but an evil spirit. "Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, . . . because he consulted a medium for guidance" (1 Chronicles 10:13).

Many statements in the Bible teach that the dead are not conscious. "When they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

The Bible strictly forbids any attempt to communicate with the dead. Scripture says Satan can be transformed into an angel of light and can work miracles (2 Corinthians 11:14). Devils can even masquerade as departed loved ones (see Revelation 16:14). The devil even created the appearance of serpents for Pharaoh during the Exodus.

This apparition claiming to be Samuel was in reality a demon, masquerading as the deceased prophet. Satan is a master of deception.

This is a very important question, because in movies and on television today, people are bombarded with stories of psychics and mediums who are supposedly communing with the dead, telling the audience what their dead loved ones are supposedly saying and doing. But this is an absolutely diabolical kind of pre-programming that's preparing the world to be deceived by the devil.



Dear Lord, I choose to turn to your Word for all my questions about guidance. Thank you for the Scriptures, which clearly show me truth.



For Further Study: Leviticus 20:27; 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



When do you receive the Holy Spirit—before, during, or after baptism?

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1–4).



It is possible to receive the Holy Spirit before, during, and after baptism. The Bible has examples of all three. At Jesus’ baptism, He received a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture says, “Immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” (Mark 1:10).

Likewise, during apostle Peter’s great sermon in Acts 2, he told his listeners, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). You also find an example in Acts 19 where some Ephesian believers were re-baptized by the apostle Paul, and at the point of baptism they received the Spirit (verse 6).

Some received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized in water. For example, while Cornelius the centurion and his family listened to Peter’s preaching, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Afterward, they were baptized.

Of course, the apostles and others were baptized in water by John the Baptist, but they didn’t receive the full filling of the Spirit until Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit came in a mighty way and empowered them to preach. After that, the tide must have gone out a little but eventually came again at a later time (see Acts 4).

The Holy Spirit is received in different “degrees” in a person’s life. It’s the Spirit coming into our lives that inspires us to surrender, be baptized, and experience conversion. The Spirit is given in cycles according to the need to prepare us for the work God has for us to do.



*Father, thank you for the promise of your Holy Spirit.
Please send me your Spirit to draw me closer to you
and to empower me to share Christ with others.*





How am I supposed to “put on” the armor of God?



“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

The primary focus of Scripture is the ongoing conflict between Christ and Satan. Revelation tells us that what began as a cosmic war in heaven will soon end in Armageddon. In this showdown between the forces of good and the powers of evil, truth and light are under constant attack from deception and darkness. And like it or not, every single one of us is involved.

The battleground for this intense spiritual struggle is the human heart. Both Jesus and the devil are supremely interested in winning possession of our minds and hearts. The Bible says, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). For this reason, Christians are called to be more than peaceful spectators in this conflict. We must be committed front-line commandos.

When we talk about putting on the armor of God—the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, the sword of the Word of God, etc.—we’re obviously not speaking literally. These are symbols. We don’t walk around with a sword or a war helmet. Although our armor and weapons are spiritual, this does not mean they are unreal or ineffective. “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4).

We must put on the unfailing armor of God—all of it! This is where many Christians fall short. They take some of the armor but forget one or two parts of the suit; sometimes, they might pay an eternal price for their neglect. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul attaches a spiritual association to seven implements of earthly armor. Let’s next consider each of these articles of defense one by one to see what we can learn.



Dear Lord, show me how to put on all of the spiritual armor and take up the spiritual weapons you have provided for my protection.



For Further Study: Ephesians 6:10–13; 2 Timothy 2:3, 4



How am I supposed to “put on” the armor of God?

*“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”
(Ephesians 6:13).*



The first item of spiritual armor mentioned in Ephesians 6 is the belt of truth. The spiritual significance is that God does not want us to simply point at the truth; He wants us to wear it and have it wrapped about us. Wearing the belt of truth also means wearing Christ, for He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Wearing the breastplate of righteousness is always in partnership with the robe of Jesus’ righteousness. The only way we can experience victory in battle against the devil is through confidence that the righteousness of Jesus covers our hearts and that we are forgiven.

When the devil sends his flaming arrows of temptation, we are to hold up the shield of faith, the shield bearing the name of our King of kings, Jesus. Through faith in His name, we can resist any enticement. “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 the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In the Bible, the foot is a symbol for the direction or “the walk” of a person’s life. Are you walking with the Lord? Are you going in the right direction? The Scriptures explain how to have a sacred walk. But it’s hard to walk when you’re sliding. Having our feet “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15 KJV) gives us good footing—and prevents backsliding.

The Bible says, “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” (Isaiah 52:7). As we become involved in spreading the good news, it will strengthen us against the enemy’s attacks.



*Heavenly Father, thank you for the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the shoes of the gospel.
Help me to wear them every day.*





How am I supposed to “put on” the armor of God?



“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

Your body has seven openings from the neck up: two nostrils, two ears, two eyes, and one mouth. Pivotal to each person’s salvation are their choices concerning what they allow to enter their minds through these senses. Jesus said, “The lamp of the body is the eye” (Luke 11:34). Also, we read, “Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge” (Proverbs 23:12) and, “Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you” (Proverbs 4:24).

We need to be careful what we watch, what we listen to, what we say, and what we eat and drink. These things affect who we are. Ask God for that helmet of salvation. Think of it as a space helmet, where you’ve got a heavenly atmosphere to breathe. It’s protecting you from harmful influences. We need to firmly strap the helmet of salvation in place and guard these avenues to the soul.

When the Bible talks about the sword, it means you need to get to know your Bible. The other armaments in God’s arsenal are defensive in nature, but the sword is primarily an offensive weapon. When Jesus fought the devil, He quoted Scripture. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin” (Psalm 119:11).

The last of the armaments is really an attitude. Any general knows that victory almost always depends on which army has the element of surprise. The Scripture says, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). We should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This does not mean we go about on our knees all day; rather, we must be constantly aware of God’s presence and that there is an enemy stalking us.

How can we stand? How can we fight? Paul gives us the answer: “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).



*Lord, in this battle of spiritual warfare,
thank you that Jesus gives me all I need to
be assured of total and final victory.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 6:17, 18; 1 Timothy 6:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does God harden people's hearts?

"He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. ... What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:18, 22, 23).



Here's an example of where I think this passage is going. The Amalekites had attacked Israel from behind when they came out of Egypt. God told Moses that He was going to show mercy to this heathen nation for a period of time, but eventually their judgment would come. The judgment that was coming on the Amalekites was based on their behavior. God chose to extend mercy to them longer than some other nations.

The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). We could all be justly executed now for our sins. When God extends grace, He extends it in varying degrees. Sometimes God strives longer with someone, but He is saving everyone by grace. None of us "deserves" salvation.

Romans 9:21 says, "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?" God does exercise His choice concerning what He does with the "clay"—how to intervene, for instance.

In the Old Testament, we have another example in Pharaoh. The Bible says that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 10:20). But the Bible also tells us that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (see Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34).

The way God dealt with Pharaoh is a microcosm of the way He deals with the wicked. He gives them opportunities, time after time, to come to a realization of the truth, and it is God's desire that all men be saved. Yet He is the One who chooses how much grace, how many opportunities, to give. God is doing everything He can to save people. But ultimately, our destiny is in our own hands.



Lord, thank you for providing me a way of salvation. Soften my heart and make me quick to respond to your abundant grace.





How do you know if a prophet is true or false?



"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Jesus spoke to this question when giving us signs of the end. "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4, 5). Later He warned, "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive" (Matthew 24:24).

Notice that Jesus did *not* say there would never be any more true prophets. The gift of prophecy was promised to the church and was not cut off at the time of Christ. Luke writes, "In the last days . . . I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17).

There are Bible tests you can apply to identify a true prophet. Here are some examples: First, prophets don't express their private opinions on spiritual matters. "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Second, a prophet never speaks in contradiction to the Word. Their teachings are in harmony with Scripture.

The Bible provides further information on different types of false prophets in Deuteronomy 18:10–12 and Revelation 21:8. It identifies charmers (someone who casts spells), observer of times (astrologers), sorcerers (someone who claims to speak with the dead), consultants of familiar spirits (mediums), users of divination (fortune tellers), witches (female psychics), and wizards (male psychics).

God has given His church the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10) for the purpose of building up believers (1 Corinthians 14:22). True prophets live a godly life (Matthew 7:15–20), have predictions that come true (Deuteronomy 18:20–22), and are called to service by God (Isaiah 6:1–10). We should follow the apostle Paul's advice to "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21).



*Lord, thank you for the gift of prophecy.
May I test all things and hold onto truth that
will change my life to exemplify Christ.*



For Further Study: 1 John 4:1–3; Daniel 10:8, 16, 17; Jeremiah 28:9; Deuteronomy 13:1–4



How do you know if a prophet is true or false?

*“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”
(Isaiah 8:20).*



Some people ask, “Do you think true prophets could appear between now and Jesus’ second coming?” Based on Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28–32), it certainly appears possible. There also will be false prophets (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24). We must be prepared to test prophets by the Bible (Isaiah 8:19, 20; 2 Timothy 2:15), heeding their counsel only if they are genuine—and rejecting them if they are counterfeit.

God knows when prophets are needed to wake people up, warn them, and turn them to Jesus and His Word. He sent a prophet (Moses) to lead His people out of Egypt (Hosea 12:13). He sent a prophet (John the Baptist) to prepare people for Jesus’ first coming (Mark 1:1–8). He also promised prophetic messages for these end-times. God sends prophets to point us to the Bible; to strengthen, encourage, and assure us; and to make us like Jesus so we will be “blameless” when the Master returns. Without the help of a prophet, many will be lost through backsliding, sleeping spiritually, and being too busy. So let’s welcome prophetic messages and praise God for sending them for our personal good.

Many recognize that most churches today do not have the gift of prophecy. Why is that? Because God normally sends prophets to His church only when it is keeping His commandments. Notice how Lamentations 2:9 puts it: “The law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.” Please also review the following texts: Ezekiel 7:26; Jeremiah 26:4–6; Ezekiel 20:12–16; and Proverbs 29:18. These statements verify that when God’s people disregard His commandments, He sends no prophet. When they begin to obey His commands, He sends a prophet to assist, encourage, and guide. So when God’s remnant church for the end-times emerged keeping His commandments, it was time for a prophet.

And God sent one—right on schedule.



*Lord, help me to open my heart to receive messages
from your true prophets. May I study them for
myself and follow their teachings prayerfully.*





What does Paul mean when he says “out of the body” and “caught up to the third heaven”?



*“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows”
(2 Corinthians 12:2, 3).*

This text has been used to support the doctrine of the immortal soul, but it has nothing to do with this at all. It is accepted by practically all commentators that the apostle Paul here was describing his *own* experience, because he spoke in the context of his own revelations (v. 1).

He was concerned he would be taken as glorying or boasting about his visions. For likely this reason, he attributed the experience to a man he knew. Paul’s soul did not leave his body; if so, he would have been dead and nowhere does he make an allusion to his death or his resurrection.

Paul is also speaking here of “visions” and “revelations.” He was not puzzled over whether he had died or not; he was merely uncertain as to how he was able to see paradise in that vision. Although it seemed that his body was taken to heaven, he felt it possible that he was taken there only in vision.

He confesses ignorance as to what actually happened. The physical impressions seemed as though He were “out of the body,” in a manner of speaking. Likewise, he wrote to the Colossian church, “For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit” (Colossians 2:5). No one interprets this to mean that some immortal soul left Paul’s body to be with his friends.

The fact is, only God knows the nature of that spiritual visit to paradise. So we would do well not to base any doctrine on this text. What Paul was interested in “boasting” about was not this unusual experience, but of suffering for Jesus Christ (v. 5).



*Dear Lord, may I never boast of spiritual
experiences in order to place me above others.
May I live a life of humility before you.*



For Further Study: Luke 23:43; 1 Timothy 1:15; Acts 9:4–6

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Is it right for churches to display a nativity for Christmas or a cross for Easter?

“He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks” (Romans 14:6).



The apostle Paul’s guidance to the church helps us recognize that there are some battles not worth entering. Many people ask me about Easter and Christmas, and I would suggest you be careful not to “major in minors.”

There is no command in the Bible that we should worship religious icons like the cross. It’s a good symbol for helping people recognize a church as being Christian, but there is no Scripture telling us we must wear a cross around our necks or carry them around. The Bible teaches us to bear the cross of Christ, meaning to follow in the path of self-denial.

If a church wants to portray a nativity scene, especially to help young people visualize and remember the birth of Christ, I think it can be a good thing. But keep in mind, the shepherds and wise men did not visit Jesus at the same time. We also don’t know exactly when Jesus was born. My greater concern over Christmas is that most people do not think of Christ. They are much more interested in the mall and using credit cards to buy—with money they don’t have—lots of things that others don’t need.

One guideline we should always keep in mind with symbols is the second commandment. God said, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4, 5). While you might never bow down in front of a nativity scene or an Easter cross, there are many religious traditions that teach otherwise.



*Dear Lord, help me to be wise and discern
how to honor you in all that I do.*



For Further Study: Romans 14:1; 15:1; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 2 Kings 18:4

Scan for more on this topic. ►





How does one walk after the spirit and not the flesh?



“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

As Christians, we have two natures at war within us—the spirit and the flesh. “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17). The carnal, or physical, desires of the flesh want to be satisfied selfishly. However, the spirit strives to be pure, do God’s will, and obey His commandments. The latter is the higher nature we should aim to please. Peter and other New Testament writers speak about this war between the spirit and the flesh.

In Romans 8, Paul is encouraging Christians to walk after our spiritual natures and not our fleshly desires. He describes this difficult battle in Romans 7: “I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (vv. 14, 15). There is a simple, but not always easy, solution to this dilemma.

Here is a crude but effective illustration. Imagine you have two dogs of the same breed. You feed one of your dogs the very best dog food, and you pet and groom him for attention, take him out for walks, and provide plenty of fresh water and rest. But the other dog you chain to a post, don’t provide food, water, exercise, or attention at any time. Now imagine releasing the two dogs in the same area. Eventually, they’ll do battle for the territory. Who will win? It’s easy to guess that the dog that is well nourished and exercised will conquer the starved animal.

It’s the same with the battle between our two natures. The way you win the battle is decided by which nature you feed. If you feed the spirit by reading God’s Word, praying, fellowshiping, and sharing your faith, you will strengthen your spiritual nature and make more room for the Holy Spirit.



Lord, please help me to feed and strengthen my spiritual side and to remain in Christ.



For Further Study: Romans 7:21–25; Romans 8:1–11



How does one walk after the spirit and not the flesh?

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).



As we work toward strengthening our spiritual nature, we need to keep our focus on the things of God. “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5). Furthermore, there are certain pitfalls to avoid. Whenever we choose to feed our fleshly nature with worldly amusements and sensual gratification, for instance, our carnal nature will be on the throne and our spirit will lose the battle.

The devil uses worldly reading materials, music, television, and movies, often disguising them as “family entertainment,” to tempt us and numb our spiritual sensors. But these instant satisfactions have potentially terrible eternal consequences. They will make your spiritual muscles limp and weak. Remember, when temptation comes, whatever side we have strengthened will win the battle. This is literally a life-and-death struggle, “for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

The good news is that if we put our trust in Him, the Lord will make sure we succeed in this effort. He promises to strengthen us. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). He reminds us that He is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20). And He assures us that we can triumph through His power. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Every day, we’re making a series of little decisions to walk after the flesh or after the spirit. Pray daily, even hourly, for God’s protection and always be mindful when investing time and resources in worldly amusements. Real satisfaction is found in the Prince of Peace, not in empty worldly pleasures.



Father, thank you for Jesus, who assures me the victory over self-destructive choices. Help me to put my faith completely in Him each day.



For Further Study: 2 Peter 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 John 5:4; Philippians 2:5

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Who are the “sons of God” spoken of in Genesis 6?



“Now it came to pass ... that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (Genesis 6:1, 2).

Some believe that the term “sons of God” refers to extraterrestrial invaders. These supposed fallen angels or aliens from space took human females as wives and produced offspring. They rationalize this belief by saying that the progeny produced by these unions were “giants” (v. 4). They believe these unholy unions were ultimately responsible for the increased wickedness of man.

On the surface, this might seem to be a reasonable explanation of Scripture. Fortunately, we can clear up any confusion on the “sons of God” quite easily by gathering more information from the Bible. The King James, for instance, uses the term “sons of God” 11 times in two primary ways. However, it never uses the term to refer to an angelic being.

Notice this: “He who makes his angels spirits . . .” (Psalms 104:4). Angels are spirits; they are not flesh. They are all around us now, but we cannot see them. They generally remain in their spirit form and have no physical integration in our world—they don’t go to school, get jobs, or raise families. They are here to “minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

Even if they wanted to marry and have babies, they couldn’t; they don’t have human DNA. It would be easier for a jellyfish to marry a mountain goat than for angels to marry people. Thus, it doesn’t make practical sense to believe that this passage in Genesis refers to the marriage of angels, fallen or holy, to humans.

Angels are not born; they are created. Moreover, Jesus tells us plainly that angels do not marry. Marriage is a uniquely human institution, reserved for mankind (Matthew 22:30 and Luke 20:36). Jesus makes a distinction between angels and sons of God. They are classified separately, which means they are not the same thing. So if the sons of God are not angels, what are they? . . .



*Dear Father in heaven, thank you for angels,
ministering spirits who serve you. May
they watch over and guide me today.*



For Further Study: Ezekiel 28:13; Luke 20:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 2:9



Who are the “sons of God” spoken of in Genesis 6?

“Now it came to pass ... that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (Genesis 6:1, 2).



While the sons of God are not space invaders, the Bible does appear to teach that there is other life in the cosmos. It is clear in Scripture that Jesus made other planets: God “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” (Hebrews 1:2).

Thousands of years ago, an intriguing meeting took place in heaven. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them” (Job 1:6). In attendance at this meeting are “sons of God,” as well as Satan, who says that he has come from Earth. The sons of God were there to represent their unfallen worlds in God’s universe. Satan was there to represent the earth.

Originally, Adam had dominion over the Earth, but once he sinned, he forfeited his ruling to the enemy. Even Jesus referred to Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31).

In the Gospel of Luke, the genealogy of Jesus is traced all the way back to Adam. Notice what Luke says about this lineage: “the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was *the son of God*” (Luke 3:38, emphasis added).

The difference between Seth and Adam is the bellybutton. Adam was created directly by the hand of God; Seth was born of Eve. Adam was the “son of God,” created to have dominion over Earth. Thus one definition for sons of God is those beings God Himself created to have dominion over the worlds He made. These beings were not born but were created directly by God.

With that cleared up, let’s next talk about the second way the term “sons of God” is used.



Dear Lord, I look forward to the day when the prince of this world is destroyed. Until then, I place my life under your rulership.





Who are the “sons of God” spoken of in Genesis 6?



“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

The other meaning of “sons of God” in Scripture refers to humans who have been recreated by God’s Spirit. We are sons of God when we are led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the primary force in God’s children, and the fruits of the Spirit will be shown in their lives.

Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Here Jesus is referring to humans, but not just any humans; these are peacemakers, the righteous children of God. In no way should this be construed to refer to angels or aliens.

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). Notice that there were those who were not sons of God, but that through receiving Him *became* sons of God. That “believing,” in the original language, means to continue to believe, to keep on having faith.

It should be mentioned that “sons of God” doesn’t mean just males. Many Bible translations, such as the King James, render the phrase “children of God.” Galatians 3:26 says, “You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Verse 28 brings this out even more distinctly when it speaks of there being neither “male nor female.” Salvation is a gift to all people.

In the apostle John’s epistles, he often uses the phrase “children of God” as well. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). The apostle Paul describes this process of being redeemed as being adopted (see Galatians 4:5).

The inescapable conclusion from these verses and others is that the sons of God in Genesis 6 refer to the righteous children of God. So who are the daughters of men? We’ll look at that next.



*Dear Lord, I give you my life and receive you
as My Father. I am glad to be known as a child
of God. May I live in your love all day long!*



For Further Study: Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:16; Philippians 2:15



Who are the “daughters of men” spoken of in Genesis 6?

“Now it came to pass ... that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (Genesis 6:1, 2).



The term “daughters of men,” therefore, refers to the unrighteous children of men, those humans who do not call on the name of the Lord. In this passage, “daughters of men” refers to the offspring of Cain and his wife.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. After Cain murdered Abel, God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth, who had children of his own and “began to call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:25, 26). As we’ve seen, those who call on the name of the Lord are called “sons of God.”

Being banished, Cain settled “in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city” (Genesis 4:16–18). Here, before the Flood, the descendants of Cain lived in cities and the descendants of Seth lived in the country. As long as they remained separate, the sons of God remained pure in their religious beliefs and practices.

However, eventually they began to intermingle. Maybe the sons of God needed supplies that could be easily obtained in the cities where the daughters of men resided. These sons of God and daughters of men became friendly with each other, and soon the descendants of Seth began to marry the descendants of Cain.

It’s even possible the sons of God went into this with good intentions. Maybe they believed they could convert these daughters of Cain, introducing them to the Lord. However, the counsel of God is clear: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

God does not want His children marrying the unconverted or the unbelieving, even if they have a pretty face, the nicest disposition, or a passionate belief in another religion. It makes no difference.



Dear Jesus, I choose to keep myself pure and true to you. I dedicate my heart into your hands and pray that all my relationships lead me toward heaven.





If Satan was cast out of heaven, why does Job 1:6 seem to suggest he's got access to it?



"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6).

First, I believe Satan was cast out of heaven after he led Adam and Eve into rebellion. The devil then basically set up the earth as a staging ground to fight God. The apostle Paul says Earth is now a theater to the universe (1 Corinthians 4:9), meaning the universe is watching what's happening on this tiny planet.

But when you get to Revelation 12, where it mentions the war between Michael and the dragon and how the dragon is cast out, it's not all regarding future prophecy. Some prophecy looks back, and this is an example of that. Satan did not just come to Earth when Revelation was written. He started working here with his fallen angels when man fell. So Revelation 12 is a prophetic picture looking backward.

I also believe Satan could have been cast out of heaven in degrees. When Christ completed His ministry and said, "It is finished," (John 19:30), Satan's access to heaven was even more limited. Yet Satan still works as an accuser of the faithful and, in some way, he can discourse with God. The Lord is everywhere, so Satan can shake his fists at God in heaven and say, "The only reason Job serves you is because you protect him," and be heard. Satan also accused Joshua the high priest in Zechariah, so he still accuses. But he can't go into the gates of heaven and tempt the angels anymore.

Someday, after Christ returns, Satan will be bound in chains: "I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon . . . who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up" (Revelation 20:1–3). I sure look forward to that day!



Dear Lord, thank you for conquering the enemy and having victory over the devil. I accept your work and stand in confidence in your protection today.



For Further Study: Zechariah 3:1–5; Job 1:6–12



Since the Bible says we shouldn't eat blood, is it wrong to receive transfusions?

*"You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood"
(Genesis 9:4).*



Many people are surprised to learn the simple fact that in the Old and New Testaments, God's people—both Jew and Gentile—are commanded not to eat blood. The Lord's instruction in Genesis is clear. In the New Testament, we read of guidelines made by the Jerusalem council in respect to some questions by new believers. Luke writes, "Abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well" (Acts 15:29). This still applies to Christians today.

Knowing this, how should Christians handle the issue of blood transfusions? Some churches teach that a blood transfusion is no different than eating blood. I respectfully disagree, because I believe the admonition in the Bible is not to *eat* animal blood for food. (Of course, you shouldn't eat human blood for food either!) This restriction of diet has both a spiritual and physical principle. Spiritually, the Bible says that the life is in the blood. And physically, we know that disease can be transferred from animal to animal by virtue of the blood.

When a person takes a blood transfusion, the purpose is to sustain life. It's not for pleasure or to relieve hunger, and it isn't taken orally for nourishment. It's a completely different process—the blood type even has to match. In Acts 17:26, the Bible says that God has made all nations one blood. So the entire human family is related in that special sense. Indeed, we are all saved by virtue of a blood transfusion from Jesus.

I like to remind people that the first miracle of Christ was turning water into pure grape juice, and He gave it to celebrate a wedding. One of the last things Jesus did before He died on the cross was to taste sour wine. He gave us pure grape juice, and He took our offering of sour wine. It's symbolic of a lifesaving blood transfusion; that's what the blood of Christ does for us.



*Dear Lord, thank you for shedding your
blood and giving your life that I may
receive salvation and live forever.*





Does Colossians 1:15 say that Christ was created or born into existence?



“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15).

This text is a very clear reference to the awesome nature of Christ, a belief under attack even in many Christian churches. A messianic prophecy in Psalm 89:27 reads, “I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth,” showing that Christ was not a firstborn prior to the creation narrative in Genesis, but rather He was to be *made* firstborn after the psalmist penned his words.

We can use a modern-day example: In America, we call the president’s wife First Lady, but that doesn’t mean she was the first lady born. It merely designates her role in America. Colossians should be read in the same way. The word “firstborn” in Greek does not mean first one given birth to. Instead, it means the one who has priority—the one who has first position.

Remember also the many times Jesus called Himself infinite. You can’t ignore those Scriptures when understanding His nature! For instance, Christ said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). He also calls Himself the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8). And one of the best Scriptures to explain that Christ is eternal is in the Gospel of John: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (1:3). Christ made everything that’s made, but He couldn’t have made Himself. He’s always existed!

Also, when we translate from Greek, the phrase “the first begotten” or “the only begotten” or “the firstborn,” could be translated as “the one who has preeminence over every creature.” It doesn’t necessarily mean He was born. Does it mean that the Father has a womb and gave birth to Jesus? Of course, this is an utterly ridiculous idea, but it helps illustrate the trouble in taking some passages of Scripture too superficially.

Jesus has always been and will always be. He is divine and one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).



*Dear Jesus, I worship you as Divine Creator,
the first over all things made. You always have
existed, and there is no limit to your being.*



For Further Study: John 3:16; Isaiah 63:16; John 1:3



Who is Michael the Archangel?

"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"
(Daniel 12:1).



Questions frequently arise in Christian circles about the identity of the mysterious biblical character known as Michael, sometimes called "Michael the archangel" and "Michael the Great Prince." Some claim that Michael is the highest of the heavenly angels, a covering cherub, or a special messenger like Gabriel. And therefore, he is a created being.

Others, such as Bible commentator Matthew Henry, assert that Michael is simply another of the many names for Jesus. Can we know the real identity of this mysterious being? Obviously, the key to deciphering this puzzle is found in Scripture (see Isaiah 28:10).

A quick look in a Bible concordance reveals that there are 15 references to the name Michael in Scripture. Ten of these are simply people named Michael. In fact, the entry for "Michael" in the lexicon of a Greek and/or Hebrew dictionary states, "The name of an archangel and nine Israelites." It is the identity of Michael, the archangel and prince, mentioned in the last five references that we seek here.

The first three of these references to Michael are in the Old Testament book of Daniel. The last two are mentioned in the New Testament books of Jude and Revelation. With an honest study and comparison of these and other verses, clues quickly emerge that lead us to the inescapable conclusion of Michael's true identity: He is none other than Jesus. He is not a created angel or cherub, but this name is another of the many grand titles for God's eternal Son!

At first glance, the Old Testament appears to portray this Michael as a prince, and the New Testament describes Him as an archangel. But by looking at other related Scriptures where similar language and wording are used, we will see an interesting pattern emerge . . .



*Dear Jesus, thank you for being the Mighty
Prince who watches over me. Protect me
today and in the times of trouble to come.*





Who is Michael the Archangel?



*“Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’”
(Jude 1:9).*

First, let's consider the meaning of some words and names. In the Greek New Testament, the word “angel” means “messenger,” and “arch” means “chief, principle, greatest, or highest.” So “archangel” simply means “highest or greatest messenger.”

The Hebrew name “Michael,” found in the Old Testament, means “who is like God” or “Who is like God?” So the title “Michael the archangel” can be translated as the “greatest messenger who is God.” Whether this name is a question, statement, or a challenge will be clear by further study. One angel did profess to be like God. That covering cherub fallen from heavenly courts is Lucifer, who became the devil or Satan by claiming to “be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14). In Revelation 12:7, Satan is opposed by “Michael and his angels” and is cast out of heaven.

The phrase “angel of the Lord” is found 68 times in Scripture. Sometimes it applies to Gabriel, who appeared to Daniel, Zacharias, and Mary. But Gabriel is called “an” angel of the Lord (Luke 1:11). He is not referred to as “the” angel of the Lord. Neither is he ever called the archangel. Gabriel is probably one of the two covering cherubs who flank the throne of God.

Remember that he said to Zacharias, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19). Lucifer once held the other position before his fall (Ezekiel 28:14). If the highest rank held by an angel is that of the covering cherubs by God's throne, then what is an archangel?

If Christ came to Earth and became a man in His battle against Satan to save humans, He might also have, in some way, identified with the angels to protect them from Satan's evil influence in heaven. In fact, there are several references in Scripture to a mysterious being identified as “the angel of the Lord” before Christ's earthly incarnation. Yet each time He is mentioned, there are clues to His identity.



*Dear Jesus, you are the Creator of all things. I
worship you as my Maker and my Redeemer.
Thank you for coming to this earth to save us.*



For Further Study: Hebrews 1:2; Ephesians 3:9



Who is Michael the Archangel?

"The Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them" (Exodus 14:19).



There are many references to "the angel of the Lord" in Scripture. I won't cover all of them here, but let's look at a few to get a feel for what the Bible says.

After Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham, she and the barren Sarah could no longer coexist. Hagar eventually fled into the desert. "Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness" (Genesis 16:7). The angel told Hagar to go back and submit to Sarah and promised that her son, Ishmael, would be the father of a great nation. When the "angel" disappeared, Hagar "called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, 'Have I also here seen Him who sees me?'" (verse 13). It appears Hagar recognized that the "angel of the Lord" who had spoken to her was really God.

God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Just as he was about to plunge the dagger, the angel of the Lord stopped him. "But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'" (Genesis 22:11, 12).

It's clear that Abraham was offering his son to God and not to a mere angel. "Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: 'By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you'" (Genesis 22:15–17). In recounting this experience in Acts 3:25, the apostle Peter also identifies this "angel of the Lord" as God.



*Lord, just as you spoke a blessing to
Abraham of old, I pray for your blessing
on my life today. I give you my heart.*





Who is Michael the Archangel?



*“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought”
(Revelation 12:7).*

If we isolate and examine the word “archangel,” we see another interesting match. The only other passage in the Bible that uses the word “archangel” is 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Note its context: “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” It is the voice of the archangel that raises the dead in Christ, and the Lord Himself who shouts it. This indicates that they are one and the same. Jesus is the one who shouts with the voice of the archangel, or “greatest messenger,” to raise the dead!

Obviously, angels don’t have the power to resurrect the dead. Only God has the power to give life (see John 5:26).

In Jude, we see the archangel contending with the devil for the body of Moses, who was resurrected and taken to heaven; later, he appeared on the mount of transfiguration to encourage Christ (Mark 9). In 1 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul describes the resurrection as happening in response to the voice of the archangel. Again, we see the parallel between these two verses; both describe the archangel in the act of resurrecting.

In conclusion, we see this majestic and mysterious being—sometimes called Michael, sometimes the angel of the Lord, sometimes the commander of the Lord’s army—veiling His divinity and appearing in the form of an angel. Yet this same enigmatic being has the power, authority, and attributes that belong only to God. He evicts the devil from heaven; He resurrects the dead; He intercedes for the saints; He judges and then stands, launching the time of trouble. He redeems the saints and receives their worship.

Now you might know who Michael is, but the devil knows too, and it won’t save him. The big question is: Do you know Him as Jesus, your Lord and savior?



*Dear Jesus, thank you for contending with
the devil and giving your life up to rescue
our planet. Please give me victory today as
I face the enemy with you at my side.*



For Further Study: Joshua 5:13–15; Revelation 19:10; 22:8, 9; Luke 4:8

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Can a thought be a sin?

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”
(Isaiah 55:7).



Logically speaking, we know that all wrongdoing begins with a thought. It has always been this way. Even sin itself began with a thought (see Isaiah 14:12, 13). And the Bible tells us that mankind was so wicked before the flood that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

In Matthew 5:21, 22, our Lord says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Jesus is addressing the danger of even thinking angry thoughts. Furthermore, we read in verses 27 and 28: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The Lord is saying that sin is not always an action; it’s an attitude. Sin is first conceived in our thoughts.

Another time, Jesus listed evil thoughts among sins that defile (see Mark 7:21–23). In the Sermon on the Mount, He spent more time talking about the attitude of pride and sinful thoughts than the actual deeds, because virtually every sinful deed originates with a sinful thought in the mind.

However, a wrong thought is not necessarily a sin. Obviously, being tempted is not a sin. During a temptation, something wrong is being proposed. At that point, it’s only a thought. But watch out! Holding on to it, dwelling on it, will cause it to gain momentum. You want to be able to dismiss that thought promptly. We can do that only with God’s help. In order to resist and squelch sin, we need to begin by asking the Lord to cleanse our minds and guide our thoughts with the Holy Spirit.



“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).





How could a God of love make a statute allowing slavery? Was it a curse against a certain race?



“As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves” (Leviticus 25:44).

It was never God’s plan for anybody to be or to own slaves. We must remember that many of the ordinances in the Bible are meant to protect civilization from customs of which God didn’t approve.

For instance, there was polygamy in Bible times. One reason was that, because of war, there were 10 women for every man. Unfortunately, it was shameful for women to never have a family. Yet because polygamy is often discussed and apparently unpunished throughout the Bible, this doesn’t mean it was God’s will. In the same way, Jesus said divorce was not God’s will, but He made that provision because of the hardness of men’s hearts. He made laws to protect people. He isn’t endorsing divorce or slavery.

Some curses in Bible prophecy deal with nations warring with Israel. They never have a relationship to a “race” of people. There are prophetic curses against Ammonites, Edomites, and Babylonians—not races, but pagan nations at war with God’s people. The Ethiopians were at war with Israel at different times in history, but Moses married an Ethiopian, and an Ethiopian eunuch converted to Christianity and brought the words of Jesus to his country (Acts 7:8). Nothing in the Bible shows that God approves of racial segregation.

Before we determine what a merciful God is all about, remember that slavery comes in different forms. The Word of God is the only thing that can set us free, so whether we are in slavery to another individual or to Satan or a sin, our freedom is based solely upon allowing His Word to work within us. We can be locked up in prison but still know true freedom.

God hates slavery. There will be no slavery in heaven. There was no slavery before sin. God had certain laws to accommodate the hardness of humanity’s heart, which could allow such a vile practice.



Dear Lord, may the time come soon when you will destroy all slavery, racism, segregation, and bondage. I pray that today I will walk in the freedom that you purchased by your blood.



For Further Study: Acts 17:26; James 2:9; Galatians 3:28



The Bible seems to suggest that God wants us to stay home on the Sabbath, so is it even necessary to go to church?

“For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Exodus 16:29).



The reason God told the Israelites to remain in their places was because they were out looking for bread on a day when there would be none. God was not suggesting that they sit in their tents for 24 hours. “In his place” really means “in the camp.” God did not want them out gathering sticks or making bread, as these were labor (Numbers 15:32). Of course, they did water, feed, and milk their flocks (Luke 13:15).

God wants us to gather for worship on the Sabbath, which He calls a “holy convocation” in Leviticus 23:3—“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.” Convocation means “to convene or come together for a public purpose.”

This was also Jesus’ example. “As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16). Even the word “synagogue” means to come together and is made up of two words—*syn* (together) and *agein* (to lead or bring).

Acts 13:44 shows that the disciples gathered in the synagogue for study on the Sabbath, and they also came together for prayer. And on the next Sabbath, almost the entire city came together to hear the Word of God. “On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there” (Acts 16:13).

One of the most important features of the Sabbath is when God’s people come together for corporate worship. When we neglect to do this, we rob God of the collective worship He deserves and ourselves of the blessings of fellowship we need. “Seven days without church makes one weak.”



Heavenly Father, thank you for a special day of worship, rest, and fellowship. May I not neglect coming together to be blessed and to encourage others on the Sabbath.



For Further Study: Acts 17:2; 13:13, 14; 18:4; Hebrews 10:24, 25

Scan for more on this topic. ▶



Can a person find favor with God by living biblically but not going to church?



"The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

First, it's important to note that there will be many people in heaven who were not affiliated with a church, either because they did not have that opportunity or another reason that prevents them from the privilege. But one of the most important principles of Christianity is that we are saved into the body of Christ, which is another name for the church. When you are baptized, you become part of Christ's body.

So I would ask in return: Why would a person say he loves God and His truth, but does not wish to fellowship with His people? That's one reason God wants us in church—because it has people with similar beliefs. It helps bolster our faith and makes us accountable. It is also an excellent environment in which to increase our capacity to love one another. People learn their most important lessons of love in the context of their biological families. Church families follow the same dynamic—especially with new believers.

If a person says, "I believe in God and want to be saved and baptized, but I don't want to go to church," it sounds to me like a man saying to his bride, "I love you, I want to marry you—but I don't want to live with you." It's saying you want the benefits of marriage but not the relationship that goes with it. Part of the Christian experience is having a relationship within the fellowship of believers.

I lived as a hermit once—up in a cave and away from society. In that kind of solitude, you have a tendency to become eccentric. Isolating oneself from society begins to affect your mind; your brain sort of atrophies. You become socially inept. In the same way, it's important for Christians to be social with fellow believers in corporate worship to avoid becoming spiritually inept. It's God's gift—so I encourage each Christian to find a biblical church in which they can grow into mature members of God's family.



Dear Jesus, thank you for the church. You identified your people as "the body of Christ" and as a bride. It is my prayer to always be united with your believers.



For Further Study: Ephesians 2:20–22; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 3:6



Who are the 144,000 mentioned in the book of Revelation?

“I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed” (Revelation 7:2–4).



During the time of Jesus’ first coming, the 12 apostles were a type of “Special Forces.” After three-and-a-half years of intensive personal training with Jesus, the disciples were used by God to achieve great victories. They penetrated Satan’s dominion to spearhead a great revival and expansion of the Christian faith.

But the book of Revelation tells us of another Special Forces unit, a vast “army” of 144,000. They have a special relationship with the Lamb, and they are sealed with a special name. They also sing a special song. Why are the 144,000 so important? Because they are commissioned with the greatest mission in the last days: to prepare the world for Jesus’ return.

Yet many are bewildered by this group—and a lot of confusion in the church exists. So what exactly is this holy army and who will fill its ranks before the end?

We are told this distinctive group is comprised of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, which are Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. It should be noted that this listing of tribes is unique, as it’s the only time that the catalog of tribes appears in this particular order (more on that later).

There is so much to share on this topic that we’ll be covering it over the next few days. Though there are diverse ideas about this group, we see they play a crucial role in the last days.



*Thank you, Lord, for the book of Revelation
and for revealing yourself through the Word.*

*Open my mind to understand truth more
deeply and how to apply it to my life today.*





Who are the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation?



"They shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries" (Ezekiel 12:15).

People wonder if the 144,000 are literally 12,000 Israelites each from the 12 tribes. Even though this belief is common in some circles, after a close look, it becomes obvious that this is unlikely. A careful study in the Old Testament reveals an important clue. Because the 10 northern tribes gave themselves completely over to idolatry, God allowed the Assyrians to carry them away in 722 BC. "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria" (2 Kings 17:6).

When the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were later carried off to Babylon, after spending 70 years in captivity, thousands returned. But with the 10 tribes, history never records any mass exodus from Assyria back to Israel. Instead, the king of Assyria transplanted an assortment of people from pagan nations in the land of Israel in the region of Samaria. "The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof" (2 Kings 17:24).

The king did send one Hebrew priest back from Assyria to teach these transplanted pagans about the God of Israel, but not from the exiled 10 tribes (2 Kings 17:27). They eventually became known as the Samaritans. As is evident in the New Testament, the Jews detested this group. Why? They were no longer pure Israelites in blood or religion. Long before the time of Jesus, the 10 exiled tribes intermarried with the Assyrians, losing their distinct identity. Today, a genealogist would be hard pressed to find even one vaguely pure descendant from these tribes—much less 12,000! These tribes were so thoroughly scattered, assimilated, and absorbed around the world by their host nations, it is entirely possible you have traces of Abraham in your bloodline!



Lord, you know your own. I put my life and future into your hands today. Thank you for the assurance that I am secure in you.



For Further Study: Revelation 4:4; Matthew 19:28; Exodus 39:14



Who are the 144,000?

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit” (Romans 2:28, 29).



Again, at first glance, one might think that the 144,000 are literal Jews. But from the time of Jesus, most of the prophecies speaking of Israel are focused on the children of faith—or spiritual Israel—regardless of whether they were Jew or Gentile by blood.

Here is a small sample of the many texts that establish this truth. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). The Lord told the Israelites, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6); in the New Testament, the apostle Peter applies this title to the Christian church: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). Romans 2:28, 29, says, “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter.”

The apostle James gives one of the most convincing Scriptures showing that the apostles viewed these tribes in a spiritual sense. “James, a servant of God, . . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). James’ letter is addressed to Christians, yet he refers to them as spiritual Jews from twelve spiritual tribes.

So why did God name the twelve tribes when listing the 144,000? This is one of the most compelling clues that there must be a spiritual meaning to the tribes listed in Revelation 7. Let me introduce this point by explaining that this is the only time in the Bible that the tribes are arranged in this order. Also, Joseph and Levi are included while Ephraim and Dan are left out. Why? Tomorrow we’ll look more at an amazing message woven into the names of the sons of Jacob.



*Thank you, Father in heaven, for adopting
and grafting me into your great family
that covers all nations and all peoples.*





Who are the 144,000?



“Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, ‘The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me’” (Genesis 29:32).

When Jews named their babies, the names nearly always had some meaning that depicted a characteristic of the child or an event connected with the birth. Notice how the wives of Jacob, Rachael and Leah, proclaimed the meaning of their sons’ names as they were born. As you continue reading the narrative in Genesis 29 of each of these births, Rachel and Leah also made prophetic statements for all 12 of their sons regarding the meanings of their names.

Here are the names of the tribes listed for the 144,000, in the order in which Revelation 7 lists them, and their corresponding Hebrew meanings as found in Scripture:

Judah means “I will praise the Lord”; Reuben means “He has looked on me”; Gad means “Given good fortune”; Asher means “Happy am I”; Naphtali means “My wrestling”; Manasseh means “Making me to forget”; Simeon means “God hears me”; Levi means “Joined to me”; Issachar means “Purchased me”; Zebulun means “Dwelling”; Joseph means “Will add to me”; and Benjamin means “Son of His right hand.”

Now here is the amazing part. Notice what happens when you line up these meanings according to the order in which they appear in Revelation. It forms a very remarkable statement declaring how God saves the church as His bride!

“I will praise the Lord for he has looked on me and granted good fortune. I am happy because of my wrestling, God is making me to forget. God hears me and is joined to me. He has purchased me a dwelling and will add to me, the Son of His right hand.” (The connecting words in italics are supplied for flow of thought.)

These names in this order describe a brief story summarizing the church’s struggle, redemption, victory, and ultimate marriage to the Lamb. It seems evident that this is a special message of encouragement for those who are in the church, believers in Christ, and not just Jews.



*Lord, I desire to be joined to you today.
May I forget my trials and focus on
the victory I may have in Jesus.*



For Further Study: Genesis 49:17; Hosea 4:17; Genesis 32:33–35



Who are the 144,000?

“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” (Joel 2:28, 29).



At Jesus’ first coming, He chose 12 men to reach Israel. “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’” (Matthew 10:5, 6). Then with the outpouring of the former rain, the 12 apostles reached thousands during the Pentecost revival. At first, they were all Jews (see Acts 2:5).

At the time of Jesus’ second coming, from the outpouring of the latter rain (the Holy Spirit), 12 times 12,000 will reach a great multitude around the world. The great multitude is converted under the influence and preaching of the 144,000!

Keep in mind that the 144,000 are not the only ones who Jesus is using to preach in the last days—just as the 12 apostles were only part of the 120 in the upper room who led out in the Pentecost revival (Acts 1:15). Not only did Jesus send out the 12 to preach in Israel, but another time He sent out a team of 70 (Luke 10:1). The 144,000 are the spiritual leaders in this revival, not the only ones preaching.

Just before the Lord pours out the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, something interesting happens in Acts 1. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples pray and put aside their differences in the upper room (verse 13). One of the 12 apostles, Judas, was dead and needed to be replaced to restore the number to 12 (v. 26). As soon as the number was complete, the Holy Spirit was poured out.

Jesus blessed, trained, and filled with the Spirit 12 people to lead His followers in reaching the house of Israel for His first coming. He will next choose 12 times 12,000 to lead His church in reaching the world for His second coming. There will be a great multitude converted as a result of their ministry!



Lord, thank you for blessing your church with spiritual leaders who will guide us in spreading the everlasting gospel to all the world.



For Further Study: Revelation 12:1; 1 Chronicles 27:1–15

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does the Bible say anything about the type of music we play or instruments we should use in church worship?



"Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy"
(Psalm 33:3).

This is a good and a big question because it addresses a very sensitive issue—where to draw the line in church music. First, I've worshiped with conservative brethren who don't use any instruments in church. They have beautiful voices, and they sing and harmonize without instruments. That's fine, and I believe the Lord has no problem with this. But I don't agree that it's wrong for Christians to use instruments in church.

King David played harps in his praising the Lord and wrote, "Praise the LORD with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings" (Psalm 33:2). There were also instruments played in the sanctuary at God's instruction (see 2 Samuel 6:5). Furthermore, just because a song is contemporary doesn't make it wrong. Biblically, it's appropriate to sing a new song of praise to God. In fact, nine times the Bible mentions singing a "new song."

I think you should consider two things when finding the right balance: the music and the lyrics. Both need to be something God can bless. Some Christian groups sing beautiful, profound lyrics—but the music sounds like a car crash. Sometimes you can't even tell what they're saying! Then you've got the other extreme: reverent music but with repetitive or unbiblical words. That's no better.

Church music should be something that elevates our appreciation for the Lord. That's the kind of music that God will sanction, especially in His house of worship. It should be worshipful and convey a sense of reverence and love. It shouldn't appeal to our lower natures with heavy syncopated rhythms that encourage dance fever. Some music can bring about baser things in us; science affirms this! I used to attend rock concerts, and I could easily see what the music did to people.

So in considering music, we need to ask: Is the music enhancing the words and lifting our souls heavenward, or is it bringing out the animalistic side of our natures? Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20).



*Lord, give us wisdom in our choice of music,
and may it always honor your name.*



For Further Study: Psalm 30:4; Psalm 96:1; Revelation 5:9



What does Jesus mean when He says, “For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together”?

“If they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together”
(Matthew 24:26–28).



The context of this passage is the second coming. First, the word “eagles” as used here is better translated as “vultures,” or birds of carrion. We’ve all seen these birds circling overhead and know that something has died.

This visual picture concerns the judgment. John writes, “I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses . . . and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great’” (Revelation 19:17, 18).

At one time, it was considered a curse for the deceased not to have their remains buried properly (1 Samuel 17:44, 46). It can be paralleled to the Flood recorded in Genesis, because that also was a judgment on the wicked. When Noah sent out a raven, it did not come back because ravens are birds of carrion, but the dove he sent out later came back because it didn’t have to anything to eat. It returned with an olive leaf, now a symbol for peace.

So Jesus here is referring to the final judgment that is going to come on the wicked of the world. In Thessalonians 4, the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and the dead in Christ rise. But the wicked are destroyed by the brightness of His coming. After the return of the Lord, the carcasses of the wicked will be from one end of the earth to the other.



Dear Jesus, I give my life to you today. I look forward to your soon coming and the blessing of eternal life.





Some say that when we're in heaven, we'll be wearing robes of light. Is this biblical?



"Whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him" (Exodus 34:35).

The Bible does talk about angels that appear to be clothed with light, but nowhere in the Bible will you find the words "robes of light." Let's go back to Eden to get a clear picture of what it might be like for us in heaven.

A major misconception is that Adam and Eve were streaking around the garden naked like a newborn! But in reality, Adam and Eve had garments of light that clothed them—an aura of light if you will—because they were righteous and they dwelled in the presence of God. Let me explain from the Bible why I believe this is true.

When Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain talking to the Lord, he came down and was glowing. The Bible says he was shining so brilliantly that the people said, "Veil your face. We can't even look on you." Those who dwell in the presence of the holy God, those who are righteous, are surrounded by an aura of light.

Jesus said to the church, "You are the light of the world." I don't believe the Lord is going to have cotton, linen, wool, or camel hair robes in the kingdom. When Adam and Eve sinned, the light went out and they were suddenly aware of their nakedness. They had no artificial clothing in the garden; that's why it says they were naked. But they weren't streaking around and suddenly realized it after eating the fruit. That would make it sound like the fruit actually made them smarter.

In the kingdom, when it talks about the saints who have these robes, I believe that these are living robes of light. It's based on what the angels wear. The Bible speaks of the angels of light. I don't think they've got weaving looms in heaven.



*Dear Lord, I invite you into my heart and pray that
my life will shine with the light of your presence.
May people see Jesus in my countenance today.*



For Further Study: 2 Corinthians 3:13; Matthew 5:14; Acts 12:7; Daniel 12:3



How did the Israelites know how to behave before the Ten Commandments were given?

“The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness” (Psalm 111:7, 8).



God’s law is eternal. Since sin is the transgression of the law and sin existed before Sinai, then there must have been a law before the time of Moses. In Genesis, you can actually find some of the commandments spoken about before Sinai. For example, see Genesis 35:1–4 for a reference to the first commandment. In addition, it was transmitted orally from person to person.

However, by the time of Moses, after the people had been in slavery under Egypt, and thereby under the influence of a pagan religion, their memory had been corrupted and diluted. That’s why Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, so his people would not be confused. Of course, God ultimately wrote the Ten Commandments so there would never have to be any guessing about what’s right and wrong.

To show this point: Long before Moses wrote the Ten Commandments onto scrolls, God said to Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door” (Genesis 4:7). The Bible also records, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). Joseph also knew it was a sin to commit adultery with Potiphar’s wife. He said, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). He evidently knew adultery was a sin before the Ten Commandments were written. It had been passed on to him, so he knew God’s law.

Originally, God’s law went from Adam orally, straight out of the garden of Eden, to become part of the oral tradition. Moreover, Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, so they knew their Father’s character, which is revealed in the Ten Commandments. They passed this knowledge to their offspring, but because of man’s failing memory, they eventually had to write it down.



Dear heavenly Father, please write your law in my heart today. I believe you are eternal and your law has existed forever.



For Further Study: 1 John 3:4; 2 Peter 2:4; Exodus 18:16

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Is the mark of the beast a tattoo?



“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14:9, 10).

In a word—no! Unfortunately, many biased Bible translations call the “mark of the beast” a tattoo. I’ve also heard that it will be a computer chip embedded under the skin. There are other strange ideas floating around regarding how this ominous mark will be deployed. But I believe the mark is actually a spiritual symbol that someone has made a choice to turn from God’s law and follow the beast.

The keys to understanding the true nature of this mark are found in the Old Testament. Regarding the commandments, Moses admonished God’s people, “These words . . . shall be in your heart. . . . You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:6–8).

When Moses says the law of God is to be in our hearts, hands, and foreheads, he is speaking in symbolic terms. The hand represents actions, and the forehead represents thoughts.

It should also be noted that the number 666 is not specifically the mark, but rather a number that helps us identify the beast power. “He causes all . . . to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark . . . or the number of his name. . . . Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666” (Revelation 13:16–18).

In bank accounts, license plates, phone numbers, and social security numbers, the number 666 might come up randomly. This doesn’t mean anything.

But if a religious power that looks and sounds like it is Christian presents laws that contradict the law of God, we can know that the mark is coming with it. Avoid this Antichrist power!



*Lord, I choose to be faithful to your
commandments and desire to be sealed by
your Holy Spirit. Mark me today as your child.
I want to be obedient to all your laws.*



For Further Study: Ezekiel 9:4; 20:12; Revelation 9:4; Ephesians 4:30

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Must we confess our sins to our Christian brethren in order to be forgiven?

“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” (James 5:16).



Principally, all sin is against God and must be confessed only to Him in the closet of prayer. Notice that even after David sinned with Bathsheba and killed Uriah, he prayed, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4).

When Achan was identified by God for stealing, his sin was against God *and the people*. Joshua told him, “I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me” (Joshua 7:19). Because his sin directly affected the people, or church, he was commanded to acknowledge this publicly. But the confession was to God, not man—because only God can forgive sin. “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

But if we hurt, offend, or abuse another human, whether Christian or pagan, we should acknowledge it and ask them to forgive us. “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

Public sin should be acknowledged publicly; offences against individuals should be addressed only with those involved; private sin should be confessed to God privately. Such confession should not be taken lightly. It needs to come from a humble heart. True confession explains what was done. There are no excuses. Paul’s example of such specific honesty can be seen in Acts 26:10, 11.

When we genuinely confess our sins to God (and to each other), we will experience God’s love and peace. We will be cleansed from unrighteousness.



I confess my sinfulness to you, dear Lord, and ask you to bring to my mind anything that needs to be made right with you or anyone else so that I can humble myself and be cleansed.





What does the Bible say about dating?



*“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.
For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?
And what communion has light with darkness?”
(2 Corinthians 6:14).*

The words “dating” or “courting” aren’t found in the Bible, but God’s Word does offer principles that can be applied to when you’re choosing a mate.

One of the first considerations for a single Christian is to avoid dating anyone who hasn’t accepted Christ. God specifically warns, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

If oxen are yoked together for work but one is weaker, they end up going in circles; they can’t properly perform their task. A husband and wife are supposed to be a team, but with opposite beliefs they will be at odds. This is likely to cause friction. Furthermore, the Christian in an unequal team can easily drift away from his or her beliefs; over time, the faith of the believer could weaken. For these reasons and others, believers should not marry unbelievers.

The Bible is also clear that any form of pre-marital sex is off limits. Paul writes, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5).

If you’re looking for a mate, put it before the Lord in prayer. God miraculously found a mate for Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and many others in the Bible. He will find one for you. “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6). A consecrated Christian can trust in the Lord to miraculously guide him or her to the right person.

That doesn’t mean He doesn’t want you to use good judgment, however. Just because you are attracted to someone, for instance, doesn’t mean you should marry that person. You need discernment, and God will give you that discernment. If God has someone set up for you, He will give you very powerful evidence that it’s the right person.



*Dear Lord, thank you for providing these
guidelines to help me make wise choices in my
associations and in the selection of a life partner.*



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 6:9, 13, 18; 2 Timothy 2:22; Proverbs 16:3, 18:22, 19:2



Does God command us to call Him Jehovah?

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:3).



You might have had people come to your door and tell you that "Jehovah" is the only appropriate name to call God. Another group claims that it must be Yahweh, which is the sacred name of God.

But I respectfully disagree with the idea that God desires we call Him by one name over another. In reality, God goes by many names in the Bible. Our text in Exodus does say one of these names is LORD, which is YHWH in Hebrew and often interpreted as Jehovah. However, here God simply revealed a new name to them. And you will find that God continues to reveal new names throughout the Bible. He never says we should use just one name when calling on Him or referencing Him.

Those who become preoccupied with the idea that we must only address God by one name are, in a certain way, making their God smaller. Indeed, God's names tell us about His character. For instance, He also says we should call him Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, and Everlasting Father.

Jesus also has many names: He's called Alpha and Omega, the Lamb, the Beginning and the End, the Gate, the Door, Son of God, and many more. It would be impractical to list them all here! The real issue is not what name we should use when speaking with God, though it should always be done with reverence, holiness, and a sense of awe.

The true issue is whether or not we honor and exalt His Word. Psalm 138:2 says, "You have magnified Your word above all Your name." Indeed, each language has different names to refer to God; but the bona fide uniting force is how God's Word transcends language or simple words and affects all people regardless of the name one chooses to call Him, whether it be Advocate (1 John 2:1), Amen (Revelation 1:8), or Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).



Thank you, Jesus, for revealing to me the true nature of God. May I learn to know you more through all your names in the Bible.



For Further Study: John 17:3; John 14:13, 14; Matthew 18:20

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What is biblically permissible when it comes to entertainment?



“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

With the onset of the Internet, smartphones, and HDTVs, the average person swims through a constant waterfall of entertainment advertisements every day. There has never been a time in history when one's senses have been so assaulted by worldly media.

We need to be aware, then, that the Bible standard is very high. In Philippians 4:8, we read, “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just ... meditate on these things.” If you apply these criteria to what you're watching, reading, and hearing, you will be following the very best counsel available.

King David writes, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3). When we follow this as a guideline, we're more likely to choose activities that nurture the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. No one can escape the truth that we are changed by what we behold (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). As we worship and look to Jesus, we become more like Him. As we worship and look to the world, we will become more like the world.

Ultimately, this is the bottom line: “What would Jesus do?” What would He watch, what would He read, and what would He listen to? If He suddenly walked into your room, would you quickly change the channel, slip that novel under your pillow, or delete your browser history? Actually, He and His angels are there now, so these are very good questions to ask yourself in every situation.

A Christian is a follower of Christ, so Jesus' example should be foremost in our minds and hearts. The only way to really find that out is to study to know Him better through your Bible. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).



Lord, increase my appetite for service rather than entertainment. When I do choose entertainment, may my choices be pleasing in your sight and bring honor to your holy name.



For Further Study: Ephesians 5:1–21; Psalm 24:3, 4



With whom did Jacob wrestle by the brook—an angel or God?

“Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day” (Genesis 32:24).



Jacob's nighttime visitor is typically referred to as a “man” in most translations, but the NKJV capitalizes the word “Man” because the context indicates that this celestial being was the Lord. Yes, it first appears that Jacob wrestles with an angel, but later, he says, “I have seen God” (Genesis 32:30) because of what the being said to him.

For instance, this messenger gives Jacob a new name. Only Jesus gives us a new name (Revelation 2:17), so I believe that Jacob wrestled with the pre-incarnate Son of God.

The Lord comes to visit Jacob, who is fearful that Esau is coming to kill him. More than a little tense, Jacob prays in the darkness, but someone touches him. He spins around to overpower the stranger, but the visitor's inhuman strength reveals this is not a mere earthling—but God. In the end, God says, “You have to let go because the day is breaking” (v. 26). Jacob answers, “I won't let you go unless you bless me.” Of course, Jacob isn't presuming that he can outwrestle God; instead, he's pleading for mercy.

The Scriptures say, “No man has seen God” at any time (John 1:18). Yet several places in the Old Testament indicate people talked to God—such as Moses. After seeing a messenger from heaven, Manoah and his wife report, “We have seen God. We're going to die” (Judges 13:22).

Christ existed before His Bethlehem incarnation, which is why He says, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). So I believe it was Christ who appeared to these patriarchs. The member of the Godhead not seen by mortals is the Father; many people have seen God the Son.

This story of Jacob also implies more than a physical tussle. It was a spiritual battle. He probably latched onto Jesus' feet when he realized he could not overcome Him. The divine touch to his hip would remind him of his dependence on God. He did not lose in this wrestling match; he truly gained.



Dear Jesus, thank you for wrestling with Jacob and giving him a new name. I pray that you give me victory today in all of my conflicts.





Is it proper to leave an inheritance to unconverted children who might squander it?



"An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end" (Proverbs 20:21).

Two facets must be considered when addressing this issue: love for God (loyalty to His cause) and unconditional love for your children.

It is important to communicate love to all our children in our estate planning. If the last act of a parent's life is to cut out a son or daughter from the will, an adult child might be forever turned from accepting the Lord. This leaves a bitter scar that is almost impossible for children to forget. "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (Proverbs 13:22).

The other dynamic is that we must give an account to God for how we distribute our assets at the time of our deaths. To leave considerable wealth to unconverted children is, for practical purposes, placing God's resources in the devil's hands. "He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

The answer, it seems, is balance. You naturally want to leave enough for your children and grandchildren to communicate your love and thoughtfulness or provide for practical needs such as education. Giving non-cash assets, such as property and family heirlooms, can also convey this.

Before King David died, he told his son Solomon that he arranged to leave the bulk of his assets to build up God's house. "Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant" (1 Chronicles 22:14).

You can be sure that David left a generous inheritance for Solomon and all his children, but there is no doubt that the majority of his prosperity went to build up the house of God. This is an excellent example for Christian parents today.

Parents set a lasting example and make a powerful impression when their children see that they chose to seek first God's kingdom with their estate planning.



*Thank you, Jesus, for leaving me an inheritance,
a sure hope in the glorious riches of eternal
life and a home with you in heaven forever.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 1:11–14; Colossians 3:23, 24; Psalm 37:29



Is vegetarianism biblical?

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats” (Romans 14:2, 3).



In the New Testament period, there was a debate about whether people should eat animals that had been offered to idols by pagans before being butchered for the marketplace.

Paul advised Christians to ask “no questions for conscience’ sake” (1 Corinthians 10:25). But if their conscience bothered them, they could just eat vegetables. It had nothing to do with the benefits of a vegetable diet over a meat diet; it concerned whether or not the meat had been offered to idols.

Salvation is the most important thing here, but in the New Testament, many ceremonial dietary issues got mixed up in the Jews’ minds as being moral issues. The apostle Paul advised all believers to be careful not to judge other believers in this regard (Romans 14:3).

While we should never say a person has to be a vegetarian to be saved, the optimal diet should be no surprise. If you want to see God’s original intention, you only need look at the creation: “I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food” (Genesis 1:29).

But eventually people developed other appetites—and throughout history, we see that God sometimes allows things, because of man’s narrow-minded insistence, that are not the best choice.

Science has clearly proven that the original vegetarian diet is far healthier. People tend to live longer on a vegetarian diet; they tend to avoid the diet-related diseases that plague our world. There is also plenty of strength produced from a plant-based diet; many athletes are vegetarians—even some endurance athletes who compete in grueling triathlons.

The original menu God gave humanity will be our diet again when we get to the kingdom. But “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).



Dear God, help us to make the choices in our diets that would honor you. And help us to refrain from judging the diets of others.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 10:25–33; Genesis 3:18; Revelation 22:2

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Should women cover their heads in church?



“Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved” (1 Corinthians 11:5).

Whenever we establish a doctrine, we want to be careful not to build it on one Scripture that might stand by itself. This is the only place in the Bible that mentions women having their heads covered in this situation. In this passage, Paul is insisting that women who pray or prophesy in public during corporate worship do so with their heads covered.

The argument is: Was this a tradition or not? If you go to the Middle East now, it's easy to see that women dress very differently than us. Many of them dress as Bible women dressed. They were extremely modest, maybe to a fault, back then. There was certain attire for prostitutes in the Roman Empire; if a woman didn't want to appear to be a prostitute, she would cover her head when in public. That doesn't mean she veiled her face, but she would cover her hair. In that day, it became a custom of respect—similar to a man wearing a tie to a formal event in our day.

Evidently, some churches felt it was wrong for women to pray in public with their husbands present and their heads uncovered. It was considered immodest. It could have been merely a tradition of the time, but the principle of respect still applies.

The Bible says, “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. . . . Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:24, 31–33).

We should respect others in the way we dress for church. More important, our worship attire should always honor God.



Our God, you are a holy God! In places of worship, and everywhere I go, may I always live reverently before you.



For Further Study: Philippians 2:3; 1 Corinthians 5:1–6



Should you leave your church if it allows same-sex marriage?

“Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23, 24).



Sometimes you might disagree with your church on some trivial difference in doctrine, interpretation, or worship practice—I don’t believe these kinds of issues should be an automatic cause of separation. But if a church endorses same-sex marriage, that’s something much more serious. The biblical model of marriage is an institution of God, a foundational truth. It is not a trivial matter.

Why? This perversion of marriage is identified in the Bible as an “abomination”—classified as a major sin (Leviticus 20:13). For context, Leviticus 20:15 talks about a man lying down with a beast.

Since we are made in the Creator’s image, for a church to endorse same-sex marriage, it openly desecrates the image of God. If they’ve gone that far, they’ve drifted into apostasy. While same-sex marriage is now receiving more acceptance in our society, the Bible is very clear: God’s Word does not change to fit in with cultural trends.

The Bible defines marriage in concrete terms. From the beginning, God “created them male and female” (Genesis 5:2). He then established marriage. He placed a holy hedge around this institution in order to protect it precisely because it is so valuable, so sacred, so important.

Did you know that the fall of virtually every great empire has been preceded by the disintegration of the family as God defines it? Based on history, if this trend is not reversed, it signals the doom of our nation as well. It’s not safe for a church to endorse that, so you might consider calling another church home for awhile.

Marriage—in God’s definition—can only exist between a man and a woman. We just weren’t created for any other arrangement.



Dear God, in this confusing, corrupted world, help me to stand firmly on the Bible and the truth about the nature of marriage as you define it. Give me the courage to turn away from doctrines and churches that openly violate your holy Word.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Romans 1:26, 27; Leviticus 18:22

Scan for more on this topic. ▶



Should Christians observe any of the Jewish festivals?



“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8).

Since Christ is our Passover, we no longer need to sacrifice a Passover lamb; He is that Lamb. This same principal applies to all of the Jewish festivals and feasts. When Christ came and then died on the cross, it changed everything. He was the fulfillment of every type and symbol in the Jewish religious system, whether to things that have happened in the past or will happen in the future.

I have no burden to challenge those who feel convicted to observe these days, but I also don't see the point. I see no reason to keep the Jewish holidays that were a shadow of what Jesus was to do here on earth. Why embrace His shadow when He's before you in flesh and blood? Why stare at a loved one's photo when they're standing next to you? Some feasts required worshipers to offer sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple, so it's obviously not possible to keep them now.

The festivals remembering the Exodus and the sanctuary were “nailed to the cross” when Jesus died (Colossians 2:16). They were shadows (v. 17), the handwriting of ordinances on paper. In contrast, the unchanging Sabbath was written in stone. That is why the veil was ripped from top to bottom in Matthew 27:51. No man could have ripped that veil in that fashion. It was an indication from God that the types that pointed to Jesus ended with the crucifixion. Daniel 9:27 prophesies this when it says, “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.”

In the place of the Passover, Jesus gave us the communion service; the national festival of the Jews was to pass away.



Dear Jesus, you are the fulfillment of all the symbols of the Old Testament; all the types and ceremonies found their complete expression in your life and death.



For Further Study: Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4; Hebrews 10:1

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Are there any Bible verses that say Joseph was previously married or had children before he married Mary?

“Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him” (Mark 6:3).



No Scripture says that Joseph had children before Mary, but we can come to that conclusion through some simple detective work. For instance, the Bible tells us in several places that Jesus had brothers and sisters. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He committed the care of His mother to the apostle John (John 19:25–27). That would have been a very unusual act if the other children had been her offspring. She would have automatically been under their care if that were the case.

Furthermore, during the time of Jesus, it was the duty of the oldest son in a family to stay home and work with the father to eventually take over his business. If Jesus had been the eldest, it would have been an insult to leave Joseph in the carpenter shop and go off preaching. But because Jesus was one of the younger sons, it wasn't a problem.

When we put these things together, it makes sense that Jesus was not Joseph's first son. You typically hear about Mary and Joseph and Jesus' brothers and sisters. However, it seems Joseph had died by the time Christ began His ministry, so scholars conclude that he was older than Mary and had already had a family before marrying her. His first wife had evidently passed away, and Joseph himself is never mentioned as being alive when Christ began His ministry.

A lot of this comes from simple deduction. Joseph died from old age and/or hard work by the time Jesus began His ministry. The older brothers of Christ continued working in the carpenter shop in Nazareth, and Jesus was Mary's only biological son as far as we can tell.

What is most important is that we know and believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Our passage today suggests the people in His hometown of Nazareth rejected Him. Will you receive Him?



Dear Jesus, I accept that you are the divine Son of God, sent from heaven for the salvation of our entire world.





Wasn't the old covenant the Ten Commandments?



"If that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: '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' " (Hebrews 8:7, 8).

The question of the covenants has been greatly distorted and misunderstood. Let's begin by noticing what the old covenant was *not*. It was not the Ten Commandments. Why? Because God's eternal law did not grow old and vanish away (verse 13). They did not have poor promises (v.6), and they were not faulty (v.7).

Then what was the old covenant, and how was it ratified? It was an agreement between God and Israel. When Moses shared the covenant with Israel, they replied, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). The people promised to keep the Ten Commandments. It was ratified by the sprinkled blood of an ox (Exodus 24:7, 8). The promises of the people failed because they tried to obey in their human strength alone.

In comparison, the new covenant was instituted and ratified by the blood of Jesus at His death (Hebrews 12:24; 13:20; Matthew 26:28). It went into effect when He died. "For a testament (covenant) is in force after men are dead, since it had no power at all while the testator lives" (Hebrews 9:17).

In speaking of the new covenant, the apostle Paul writes: "Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it" (Galatians 3:15). This means that after the death of Christ, nothing could be added to or taken away from the new covenant. Jesus introduced the Lord's Supper on Thursday night before He died, so it came under the new covenant (Matthew 26:28).

Here's a question worth asking: "When did Sunday-keeping begin?" Everyone answers, "After the resurrection." If that is the case, then it cannot be part of the new covenant since it took place *after* the death of Jesus. Can anything be "added" after the death of Jesus, the testator?



Dear Lord, thank you for making a new covenant based on the promise of the life you gave on Calvary.



For Further Study: Ezekiel 16:60; Hebrews 7:22; Ephesians 2:15



Wasn't the old covenant the Ten Commandments?

"Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second" (Hebrews 10:8, 9).



Some Christians believe that the Ten Commandment law was only a part of the law of Moses, which disappeared with the old covenant. These verses in Hebrews 10 are used to support this premise.

The "law" of verse 8 is undoubtedly associated with the "first" covenant, which is taken away in verse 9. But did that law include the Ten Commandments? Those same sacrifices and sin offerings are described in 2 Chronicles 8:12, 13, when Solomon offered burnt offerings "according to the commandment of Moses."

This makes it plain that the law concerning those burnt offerings—the one mentioned in Hebrews 10:8—was called the commandment or law of Moses. It was part of the old covenant system that was taken away by "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (verse 10). But note: The Ten Commandments were not part of that. Christ is quoted in verse 9, saying, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second."

The full text of what Christ said comes from Psalm 40:8, which says, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart." This law is tied to the second (or new) covenant that was to be established. This is reinforced a few verses later in Hebrews 10, where it says, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (v. 16).

The law that was in the heart of Jesus and which did not end with the old covenant is the Ten Commandment law. Magnified by Christ (Isaiah 42:21), it was transferred from the tables of stone to the tables of the heart.



*Dear Lord, today I invite you to write
your law in my heart and mind.*





Wasn't the old covenant the Ten Commandments?



"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone" (Deuteronomy 4:13).

The Bible says, "If that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second" (Hebrews 8:7). So let me ask you: Has any man been able to find a flaw in the handwriting of God? The psalmist declared, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

Romans 7:12 adds, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." Does that sound like something weak and imperfect? No law could be perfect *and* faulty at the same time. It becomes quite apparent that the old covenant could not have been the Ten Commandments themselves; instead, the Commandments were the terms of the covenant, not the actual covenant.

The word "covenant" means agreement—at fault with this first agreement was the promise of the people, "All the LORD has said we will do." The new covenant is the same law, but written by the Lord on the human heart. "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" (Jeremiah 31:33). Notice, it is the same law you find in the Ten Commandments, but now it's written in the heart. Indeed, the new covenant goes even deeper than the letter of the law—it goes to the spirit of the law.

Jesus illustrated this when He said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Jesus taught us that the new covenant is not based on merely obeying the Ten Commandments, but also the attitude behind our deeds. The change of heart will lead to the change of life.



Dear Jesus, thank you that I may come to you for a new heart that will empower me to live a new life.



For Further Study: Galatians 4:24–26; Revelation 3:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Did Jephthah put his daughter on an altar and kill her?

“Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, ‘If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me ... shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering’ ” (Judges 11:30).



When Jephthah’s daughter was the first to greet him, he said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! ... For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it” (verse 35). She answered, “My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth” (v. 36).

The chapter goes on to say that he “carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. *She knew no man*” (v. 39, emphasis supplied). Now notice her response, “Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity” (v. 37, emphasis supplied). She is not crying over her impending death, but over her not being able to marry and have children.

I believe that what Jephthah did to fulfill his vow was similar to what Hannah did with Samuel (see 1 Samuel 1:27, 28). He brought his daughter to the sanctuary, and she was consecrated to the service of the Lord, which apparently meant she was to remain celibate.

There are several biblical reasons why I believe Jephthah did not kill his daughter, but consecrated her instead. First, human sacrifices were an abomination (Leviticus 18:21). Second, Jephthah had it in his power to redeem his daughter (Leviticus 27:2). Finally, the Bible says she bewailed her virginity and that Israelite women went yearly to comfort her (Judges 11:38–40). Where did they go? They went to the temple, because her life was consecrated to the Lord.

This corresponds with Anna mentioned in the New Testament, “who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37).



Dear Lord, may I guard my tongue and never make rash vows. Help me to keep the promises I make to you and others.





Did Jesus say that Peter was the foundation of the church?



"I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Immediately after Peter's wonderful confession of Christ as the Son of God (verse 16), Jesus spoke the words, "You are Peter." Jesus used the same Greek word that is used 161 times in the New Testament for Simon Peter—"Petros." In fact, the word "Petros" is never used for any other purpose in the New Testament than to designate Peter. The name means "pebble" or "rolling stone."

But *after* Jesus called Peter by his name Petros, He said, "On this rock I will build My church." This time Christ used the word "petra" for rock. The word "petra" represents a huge, unmovable boulder—a real Gibraltar. This word is never used to designate Peter. Instead, it is used repeatedly to describe Jesus Himself. Paul speaks of Christ as our Rock (see 1 Corinthians 10:4).

The church was not built upon the unstable Peter (Petros). In fact, just a few verses later (v. 23), Christ rebuked Peter with strong language, speaking of him as an agent of Satan! Rather, God's church would be built on Christ (petra), the Rock of Salvation. It is Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God that comprised the firm rock of truth at the foundation of the church, not the shifting character of the unconverted Peter.

Notice how Jesus responded right after Peter made the confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Christ assured him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (v. 17). Peter is blessed for his confession, not because the church would be built upon him. We, too, may be blessed when we confess Christ as the true Rock of our salvation.



"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent word! What more can He say than to you He hath said—to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled."



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4–7



Doesn't the ring on the finger of the prodigal son support the wearing of jewelry?

"The father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet'" (Luke 15:22).



A vital principle of Bible study is to seek to understand the meaning and purpose behind a passage of Scripture. Using one verse to prove a point that was never intended does injustice to the Word of God. So we need to ask, "What is the message of this text?" Some have used this Scripture to justify the wearing of jewelry, but like all parables, this story teaches us about spiritual realities.

God is here represented as welcoming home one of His lost children. The prodigal "came to himself" (v. 17) and returns home to the heavenly Father. The welcome he received describes how God treats us when we return to Him.

There are three things the father does for his returning son. He puts the best robe on him (which implies his own robe), he puts a ring on his hand, and he puts sandals on his feet. The best robe is a beautiful illustration of how Christ covers us with His pure righteousness. We all come in filthy rags. Sandals were worn only by members of a household; servants couldn't afford shoes. The Lord tells us here, "You are part of My family again."

So what does a ring on the son's finger mean? Did the father simply want his son to look nice? No. It meant much more. It was probably a signet ring, which represented the authority to transact business for the family. The level to which the father raised this prodigal son is astounding; it probably shocked the people who first heard Christ tell this story.

The ring had nothing to do with whether or not we should wear jewelry. It's a stretch to use this text to support decorating our bodies with ornaments. It's better for us to study all of what Scripture says about how God's remnant people dress to prepare for Christ's coming than to squeeze a questionable point out of this verse.



Dear Lord, may I decorate my life with the qualities of a Christ-like life.





Who is the woman's seed bruising the serpent's head?



"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" (Genesis 3:15).

The Lord gave this prophecy to Eve, who is a symbol of the church, saying that "her Seed"—her descendant, Jesus, and His followers—would bruise the head of the serpent, but the serpent would bruise His heel.

The quickest way to kill a serpent is to smash its head. And the word "bruise" there actually means to "smash" the head of the serpent. When a person is bruised on the heel, their progress is merely impeded. The devil has successfully hindered the progress of the Christian church, but it has not been a mortal wound. It has not stopped the church's motion. I believe God was making a prophecy about a battle that would rage in our world between the serpent (the devil) and the woman (the church) from the day of mankind's fall in the garden until Jesus returns.

In Revelation 12 you'll find a dragon (also called a serpent in verse 9) trying to devour a woman's baby as soon as the child is born (verse 4). This is the same serpent, Satan, who is called "the accuser of our brethren" (v. 10) and who persecutes "the woman who gave birth to the male Child" (v. 13). Although Satan has been allowed to wound the heel of the woman, the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 adds that the woman and her Seed—or offspring, who is Christ—would crush the serpent's head. At the cross, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent, the devil.

When you kill a snake, it can still thrash around after its head has been crushed. It can even still bite for a time also. The devil was crushed at the cross, but he's still thrashing around, snapping his jaws, and squirting venom. Not until our Lord returns will the church be fully freed from the torment of this defeated foe.



Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus, the promised Seed, into this world to defeat the serpent and rescue us. Help us to cling to you until Jesus returns to take us home.



For Further Study: Genesis 3:1–15; Revelation 12:13–17; Revelation 20:2



If all His followers have died, how could Jesus say that some of them would not taste death until they see Him coming in His kingdom?

"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matthew 16:28).



This verse can be best understood in light of what immediately follows it—the transfiguration of Christ before Peter, James, and John. The next chapter describes this experience and how God spoke out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5).

The apostle Peter refers to this event in his writings. Notice how he describes it: "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" (2 Peter 1:16–18, emphasis mine).

This clearly is a reference to the transfiguration of Jesus. It was like a glimpse into the future for these three disciples. Peter speaks of this preview as the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In addition, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mount. Why? They represent the people who will be saved in God's kingdom at the second coming. Moses represents those who have died and will be resurrected, and Elijah represents those who never taste death.

But isn't Moses still dead? Notice what the Bible says. "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses . . ." (Jude 9). Why else would Satan argue at Moses' graveside except that the Lord resurrected him?

Peter, James, and John saw a glimpse of the coming of Christ before tasting death. It's my hope to see Jesus come soon! How about you?



Dear Jesus, it is my sincere desire to be ready for your soon coming. Prepare my heart that I may receive you when you return.





Doesn't the phrase "unquenchable fire" indicate that the fires of hell will never go out?



"Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:10–12).

An unquenchable fire is a fire that cannot be put out. Once it begins its work, nothing can stop it. Likewise, when the fires of hell begin, no amount of water can extinguish the flames. The question to be asked is, "Will it ever go out?" Yes, of course—when its work is done. When sin and sinners are consumed, the fires will quit. Isaiah 47:14 describes this work as ending in "stubble." After the fires of hell have done their work of destruction, the flames will go out.

The "fire" mentioned in Matthew 3 speaks of the punishment of the wicked. Since God is described in the Bible as a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24), sin cannot exist in His presence. It is consumed and destroyed. And so at the end of time, when all have made their final choice to either accept or reject the Lord, His glorious coming to this earth will certainly destroy and consume sinners who refuse to let go of sin.

All three verses in the above text present two classes of people—the saved and the lost. Verse 10 compares the lost as a tree that does not bear fruit and is cast into a fire and consumed. Verse 12 describes sinners as chaff that will "burn up." Like a refiner's fire, the sin in our lives will either be burned up—or it will burn us up with it if we are unwilling to release it to God.



Dear Father in heaven, baptize me with fire and remove all sin from my heart and purify my life.



For Further Study: Hebrews 12:29; Malachi 3:2, 3

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Doesn't the Bible support the drinking of wine?

*"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities"
(1 Timothy 5:23).*



It is often argued that the wine the apostle Paul recommends to the disciple Timothy in this passage is alcoholic. Yet this is false for many reasons: First, the Greek word *oinos* is used and can denote either fermented or unfermented grape juice. It depends on the context. In addition, there are historical references supporting the use of unfermented wine for medicinal purposes in the ancient world. For example, Athenaeus (AD 280) counsels to use unfermented grape juice for stomach disorders. Some health authorities today urge the drinking of grape juice based on its rapid therapeutic ingestion into the system.

Timothy might also have been living as a Nazirite if he was drinking only water. Paul was telling him to use a little grape juice, which has a soothing effect on the body—indicating that Timothy abstained and needed to be urged to take even just a little new wine. Drinking fermented wine can contribute to stomach ulcers; Paul would never recommend old wine for stomach therapy.

Earlier in the same epistle, Paul instructs Timothy that bishops were to be abstinent (*nephalion*) (1 Timothy 3:2, 3). The apostle would not have encouraged Timothy to drink alcoholic beverages when he had, earlier in the same letter, forbidden their use by church leaders (1 Timothy 3:8).

Moreover, since alcoholic drink is categorically condemned in Proverbs 20:1 and 23:29–32, it is inconceivable that New Testament church leaders would condone it.

So there is nothing in Paul's counsel to Timothy to indicate that this "little wine" was fermented. Since Timothy had an apparent problem of digestion and other infirmities, the recommended use of grape juice might well have been an effective dietary supplement.

The Bible writers also recommend the unfermented grape juice as a blessing to the body. "Thus says the LORD: 'As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, "Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it"'" (Isaiah 65:8). The kind of wine that is "in the cluster" is nonalcoholic.



*Dear Lord, I commit to not drinking anything
that will cloud my mind and leave me
open to suggestions from the enemy.*





Doesn't Jesus support the drinking of wine?



"When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine' " (John 2:3).

The whole of Scripture is clearly and adamantly against the consumption of alcohol, but human nature will look for any textual ambiguity as a "loophole" to justify drinking it. An example of this is the wedding in Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine. "When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from . . . the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'" (John 2:9, 10).

Those who support the intake of alcohol suggest this must have been alcoholic wine—after all, it was a wedding, and every wedding has wine . . . right? But let's consider the implications. There were six pots for Jesus to fill, and each of those would hold 20 to 30 gallons. That's up to 180 gallons of beverage!

Are we to believe that Jesus made 180 gallons of a destructive drug, enough to get every guest drunk and launch this new marriage with slurring lips and staggering feet? Indeed, He would have been acting against His own Word!

The best conclusion is that Jesus made unfermented wine—and the governor of the feast complimented the groom on its pure quality (John 2:4, 6, 10). Fermented wine could be found in Israel all year long. This is the reason that the master of ceremonies was so surprised. He was marveling that someone had produced so much fresh grape juice that normally could only be found during the harvest.

Although fermented and unfermented wines are translated from the same original word, the biblical context establishes that no alcoholic drink is approved by God. Jesus certainly wouldn't go contrary to the Old Testament, which forbade the use of fermented wine (see Proverbs 23:29–32).

It is true that "wine" is approved for use in the Bible, but this is the pure juice of the grape without fermentation.



*Dear Jesus, I choose to guard my appetite
and only take in what is pleasing to you.*



For Further Study: Habakkuk 2:15; Ephesians 5:18; Proverbs 20:1

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does God punish people for the sins of their ancestors?

“For I ... am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments”
(Exodus 20:5, 6).



Is God here really saying, “I’m going to place a curse on a person’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren”? No. The Lord is explaining a life principle. Parents tend to reproduce their negative behaviors in their children. And you can usually trace this effect for three or four generations.

The Lord does not arbitrarily impose your sin on your children. The Bible says clearly, “The son is not accountable for the sins of the father, and the father is not accountable for the sins of the son. The righteousness of the righteous will be upon them. The wickedness of the wicked will be upon them” (Ezekiel 18:20). In another place, the Bible says, “Even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,” says the Lord God, “they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:20). God does not reward or punish offspring because of what the parents do. What He’s saying in this passage is that there’s a strong probability that the children are going to follow the example of their parents. And when this happens, they will receive similar consequences.

A tragic example of this is when the kingdom of Israel split. Jeroboam and the children of Israel in the north stopped worshiping at the temple of God. By his example, his children started to pray to idols, and then his grandchildren started to pray to idols, and so on—they lasted four generations, then they were destroyed. The same sort of thing happened again and again in Israel. Not because God cursed them, but because it’s important for us as parents to be good examples. That’s what God is impressing here in Exodus 20.



Dear Jesus, make me a better example to my family and friends and help me to honor you with all my choices.





Are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob alive in heaven right now?



*“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”
(Matthew 22:32).*

In this passage, Jesus is talking about the future resurrection. He did not mean that Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob were alive, but rather they *would* be alive at the time of the resurrection—because He is the God who can give life to the dead.

Jesus does not look upon deceased believers as the dead but rather sleeping. When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died, Christ said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps” (John 11:11).

The context for Matthew 22:32 is Jesus speaking to the Sadducees, who did not believe in any type of resurrection whatsoever (see v. 23).

Here’s the full text that clarifies the matter: “*But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*” (Matthew 22:31, 32, my emphasis). The topic under discussion was the resurrection, not the state of the dead. Jesus is speaking about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as patriarchs who will take part in the resurrection.

The assurance of this promise is so strong, there are times when the Bible speaks of it as though it were already accomplished. Notice how Paul writes it: “As it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’ . . . in the presence of Him who he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist *as though they did*” (Romans 4:17, my emphasis).

Another example is in our relationship to Christ. “God, who is rich in mercy, . . . made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4–6). Because of the death of Christ on Calvary, we are assured of eternal life, even if we are laid down in the sleep of death.



*Dear Lord, thank you for the assurance
of the resurrection. I choose to live today
as if heaven has already begun.*



For Further Study: Genesis 17:7; Exodus 3:15; Mark 12:27



If the righteous dead do not go directly to heaven, then how was it that Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration?

“Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus” (Mark 9:4).



It’s interesting that the very last thing the Old Testament says is, “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,” and, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 4:4, 5). Then in Matthew 17:3, we find these two Bible heroes appearing with Jesus and three of His disciples on a mountaintop. This is an important story!

First, the Bible teaches that Elijah never died and was taken in a fiery chariot to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). There are a few instances in the Bible when God takes people directly to Himself (see Genesis 5:24). But that is obviously not the case for the majority of Earth’s inhabitants. The Scriptures teach that even David did not ascend to heaven at death but is in the grave (Acts 2:34).

So, if Moses died, as is stated in Deuteronomy 34:5, then how could he appear on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Jesus? There is a reference in Jude 9 that gives us a window into what happened to Moses after his death. “Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 9).

Michael, which is one of the names for Christ (see Daniel 10:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; and Revelation 12:7), was a ruler over the angels and resurrected Moses. (See page 109.) Even Jewish tradition states that three days after Moses died, the Lord came and raised him up.

There is another example of a “special” resurrection; it occurred after Jesus died on the cross. “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:52, 53). This was an unusual occurrence, obviously. Most of us will be raised when the Lord comes the second time.



*Dear Jesus, thank you for the promise
of hope and of the resurrection!*





Is the Shroud of Turin a real biblical artifact?



“They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices” (John 19:40).

While this isn't really about the Bible, it remains a popular question about Jesus that needs some attention.

The Shroud is a long strip of linen bearing the image of a man who appears to have suffered physical trauma consistent with a crucifixion. Many believe this is the actual cloth used to embalm Jesus.

I don't believe that this shroud has anything to do with Jesus. The Bible says that His body was bound in strips of linen with spices (John 19:40), more like a mummy, and that a separate napkin was wrapped around His head (John 20:5–7). The Shroud of Turin, on the other hand, is a single cloth that was folded up the front and down the back of the individual's body.

A few years ago, the first scientific tests suggested that it did date back to the time of Christ and that it originated in Palestine. For example, they found pollen particles on it that were native only to Palestine. Later, different researchers announced that the cloth dated back only to about AD 1300. Now the University of Padua claims that the shroud dates between 300 BC and AD 400. Other research has concluded that the stains on the cloth are not from blood.

Around the time the Shroud first appeared, there were many other “true” shrouds also appearing around Europe. At least 43 “true shrouds” circulated in medieval Europe after the Crusades, which brought lots of supposed “relics” from the east. In fact, you can still travel Europe and see some of these shrouds. Tellingly, no burial garments from the time of Christ resemble the Shroud of Turin.

The Shroud might have been the result of a crucifixion, as Muslims punished some of the Crusaders by crucifying them. Either way, we know the Lord does not want us worshipping relics, true or false. When the children of Israel began to pray and burn incense before the bronze serpent Moses had made, King Hezekiah crushed it into powder.



*Dear Lord, from the testimony of Scripture alone
I believe you died, were buried, and raised to
eternal life. In a living God do I put my trust!*



For Further Study: Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53



Did God really give Noah permission to eat “every moving thing” for food?

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs” (Genesis 9:3).



The original diet laid down in Genesis 1:29 and 3:18 consisted of nuts, fruits, grains, and vegetables. This plan did not change until after the Flood. Then, because most vegetation had been destroyed by the Flood, God allowed the use of animal meat for the first time. God foresaw this need and instructed Noah to take into the ark clean animals by seven, while unclean animals went in by two (Genesis 7:1, 2).

Even though Genesis 9:3 seems to be an unrestricted permit to eat any kind of animal, it was not without limits. God said, “I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” In the same way that God had given vegetation, so now He gave flesh. But obviously, all vegetation was not good to eat. There were thorny weeds and poisonous plants that could not be eaten. Likewise, God proceeded soon afterward (Leviticus 11) to reinforce for future generations that certain animals were not good for food and should never be eaten.

It’s interesting to note that this instruction was given to Noah immediately after leaving the ark. Since it takes two (both a male and a female) to propagate a species and only two of each unclean animal were saved in the ark, it is certain that God did not give license to eat the unclean animals. If He had, the unclean species would have been exterminated soon after the flood.

I just can’t picture Noah sitting down to a meal of skunks and reptiles when he clearly understood the difference between clean and unclean animals when they boarded the ark. God outlined these restrictions for the Israelites after they left Egypt to make plain what was probably understood by earlier generations. I think Genesis 9:3 is best understood as the Lord simply telling Noah, “I now give you permission to eat flesh foods.”



Dear Lord, thank you for giving guidelines on what is best for my body. I want to live by your ways.



For Further Study: Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 14; 1 Corinthians 10:31

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does Matthew 28:1 show that Christ rose from the dead on Saturday night?



“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre” (Matthew 28:1 KJV).

Some believe that Christ’s resurrection took place late Saturday afternoon. They interpret the phrase “end of the sabbath” as drawing near its close and “as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” as approaching sunset on Saturday night.

But this interpretation is not only inconsistent with the rest of Matthew’s account of the resurrection, it also does not harmonize with other Gospels. Mark writes, “Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2).

Others believe the women were at the tomb late Sabbath afternoon and found it empty. But notice the next verse: “They said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’” (v. 3). If Jesus was gone, why would they return and ask for help to roll away the stone 12 hours later?

The word “dawn,” as used in the Bible, refers to the early morning as day breaks. It doesn’t “dawn” toward sunset or darkness. The words “in the end of the Sabbath” actually belong to the preceding verse. The original biblical manuscripts didn’t contain punctuation to separate sentences. The writing was one solid line with no commas or periods or spaces!

The verse just before Matthew 28:1 also teaches us which day the women came to Jesus’ tomb. It describes how the Jewish leaders were concerned that Christ’s disciples might steal His body and “went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard” (Matthew 27:66).

But *when* did they approach Pilate to secure the tomb? “On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation” (v. 62). The tomb was sealed on Sabbath with guards “lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away” (v. 64). This confirms that the women could not have come to the tomb Sabbath afternoon, but rather on Sunday morning.



*Dear Jesus, as you rested from your works
on the Sabbath in the tomb, may I also
rest on the Sabbath in your grace.*



For Further Study: Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–10



Does the phrase “the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever” mean the fires of hell will never go out?

“He himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever” (Revelation 14:10, 11).



The word translated as “forever” in the Bible does not always mean “without end.” In fact, the Bible uses this term 56 times in connection with things that have already ended. (Sometimes you will need to look up the word “ever” in a concordance to find them.) For instance, in Exodus 21:1–6, the Hebrew servant was to serve his master “forever,” but it was obviously only as long as he lived. Hannah took her son Samuel to God’s house to abide “forever” (1 Samuel 1:22), but she plainly limited that time to “as long as he lives” (verse 28).

The term is clearly defined in Psalm 48:14: “For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.” The desolation of Edom was to ascend “forever” (Isaiah 34:10), yet we know that it does not still burn but, as the Bible says, lies in “waste.”

According to these definitions of the term “forever,” the wicked will suffer as long as they continue to live in the fire. Then, as the Bible states, “The wicked . . . shall be destroyed forever” (Psalm 92:7). This means that when the work of the fire is completed, it will go out. The Bible says these fires will “burn them up” and will leave them “neither root nor branch” and will leave “ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:1–3).

And so the punishment of the wicked will be forever complete. It is not an everlasting state of torment, which would portray God as an evil sadist. Our loving Lord will blot sin out of existence because He knows it would eventually destroy our world and everyone in it.



Dear Lord, thank you that someday all sin will forever be removed from our earth.



For Further Study: Psalm 37:10, 20, 36; 2 Peter 2:6; Matthew 3:11, 12

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Is there anything wrong with jumping and clapping in church?



"Let all things be done decently and in order"
(1 Corinthians 14:40).

Worship is a hot topic that can get people into heated discussions. Members can have strong feelings and opinions about how to conduct worship, with music being an especially sensitive issue. We should not be surprised, as worship will be a central issue just before the coming of Christ.

I believe the apostle Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church regarding worship conduct is a solid guideline for keeping us on track. The word *decent* means to conform to standards of propriety, good taste, and morality. It also means to be free from immodesty. Far too many churches emphasize an "experience" in worship that is heavy on emotion and borders on the sensual.

Discussions on worship remind me of how God made our brains. There are the "higher" powers of the mind in our frontal lobes; this is the moral center for making wise choices. It is the most uniquely human aspect of our brain in comparison with other animals.

Then there are the lower functions in our brains, such as the limbic lobe, which drives by emotion. Some people allow this part of the mind to "run" their lives. They live by their feelings rather than using the frontal lobe to guide their choices. While God gave us emotions, unguided feelings can be deceptive. Emotions should be subservient to our moral thinking, not the other way around.

How does this relate to worship? Too often church services lean toward stimulating the lower brain functions. People come to believe they are only worshiping God if they "feel" elated. It's misleading. While I believe we should make our services joyful, what guides that joy is not loud music, colorful lights, clapping, and jumping around . . . but rather a deep appreciation for what God has done for us in the life of Jesus.

Paul guides us to have services that are "decent" and in "order." These words reflect the higher powers of our mind. When feelings are the primary controlling force in worship, we will be led into an experience that can be false and misleading.



Dear Lord, may the joy and peace I experience in life come from deeply knowing and worshipping you.



For Further Study: Psalm 95:6; John 4:24; Colossians 3:14–17

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the second commandment forbid making any kind of religious artwork?

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4).



After the first commandment designates the true God, the second teaches us how He is to be worshiped. This commandment specifically forbids the veneration of objects representing God. “You shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:5). It is the especially the worship of these images that constitutes sin.

This text does not forbid religious illustration, photography, or the fine arts. God Himself instructed carved angels to be made in the most holy place (Exodus 25:18), embroidered angels in the tabernacle hangings (1 Kings 6:29), and a cast bronze oxen in the courtyard (1 Kings 7:25). The temple was beautifully decorated, yet never was there a command to bow down and worship the building or its articles in the place of God.

The Lord once instructed Moses to fashion a bronze serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8, 9). He wanted to teach His people to look to Him for help. There was nothing wrong with it as an illustration that pointed people to have faith in God’s healing power. Yet the same bronze serpent was ordered destroyed when it became an object of worship and veneration. “He [King Hezekiah] . . . broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan” (2 Kings 18:4).

So, along with the Canaanite gods, the good king actually destroyed something that originally served a good purpose but had turned into an object of false worship. It’s kind of like Jesus’ statement about cutting off your right hand if it offends you. An image or piece of religious artwork is not sinful in and of itself, but when it becomes an object of supreme adoration in the place of God.



Search me, O Lord, and reveal any form of idolatry in my heart that might separate me from you.





Did Jesus purposely use parables to frustrate people who sought to be converted?



"To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them'"
(Mark 4:11, 12).

Some have read this text and wondered if Christ used parables to deliberately confuse certain people who might otherwise have been converted. Like many Bible questions, it is best to look at other verses to see what God says about His desire for people to be saved. See Revelation 22:17, for instance, which makes it plain that "whosoever desires" may come to and be accepted into the kingdom.

The apostle Peter stated, "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" (2 Peter 3:9). It is clear through other Bible writers that God never intended to hide any truth that would lead a person to repentance and conversion.

So what does this passage in Mark really mean? The verse is made clear by reading a parallel account in Matthew's Gospel, when a reason is given why some people do not hear or see the truth. "For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them" (Matthew 13:15).

Christ's words are spoken in irony. Another way of saying this verse might be, "These people plug their ears and refuse to listen! They squeeze their eyes shut and cannot see anything." Zechariah describes some people who turn from God by saying, "Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law" (Zechariah 7:12).

Jesus wisely used parables to bypass prejudiced minds. But for those who insisted on refusing to hear His words, the parables were meaningless and only "increased" their darkness. May it not be so for you and me!



Dear Jesus, open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth you have for me!



For Further Study: Isaiah 6:10; Matthew 13:4; 2 Corinthians 4:4



How can I make my faith in God stronger?

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).



Faith is a word we don’t always use in our everyday vocabulary. It’s often relegated to the field of theology. But actually, faith is the foundation of our daily walk with God. Simply put—it’s trusting in the Lord. Every time you sit in a chair, you have “faith” that it will hold you up and not collapse beneath you. Faith is trusting that God will hold us up through the thick and the thin.

Many people have strong faith when everything is going well in their lives, but when a storm comes through, they lose their grip on God. It reminds me of a simple illustration from the field of aviation. As a pilot, one of the expressions I’ll sometimes use is “flying blind.” It simply means that when your outside visuals are obliterated by clouds, bad weather, or darkness, you fly the airplane solely by relying on the instruments. It’s a bit scary when you first learn how to trust what’s on the panel in front of you and not worry about the darkness outside. But without it, you are destined to crash and burn!

Exercising trust in God when things are dark and gloomy helps our faith grow strong. As we develop a relationship with Jesus through daily Bible study and prayer, we learn that He truly loves us and has our best interests in mind. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). The more we come to know of God’s love, the more we’ll trust Him.

Every Christian is given a measure of faith by God (Romans 12:3). It’s amazing what even a little faith can do. Jesus said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).



*Dear Jesus, increase my faith, deepen my trust,
and help me to lean on you more and more.*





Is having a private baptism without a pastor present biblically valid?



“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3).

The people who baptized in Bible times were men who had been commissioned by God and given authority: the prophets, John the Baptist, and the apostles, for example. The Bible seems to establish this as a precedent.

Acts 6:3 says that when the apostles set up the office of deacon, they chose seven men who were “of good reputation” and “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” Then, to make it official, these men were set before the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them (verse 6). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39), we don’t know if he was still a deacon or if he had been “promoted.” We do know, however, that there is no record in the Bible of the disciples baptizing one another.

Let me tell you why I think that is. I’m a pastor, and if all of my church members believed they could go out and baptize whomever they felt led to baptize, without any kind of clearing process, they could wind up bringing people into the church who had not really been taught. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:19, 20, my emphasis).

I’m not going to be dogmatic and say that God would not honor a private baptism at which no pastor is present. There have been Christians in communist countries who accepted Jesus and then baptized each other. But they were operating under extreme circumstances. Insofar as possible, baptism should be a *public* declaration of our decision to follow Christ.

If you have Bible-teaching churches in your community that teach and practice baptism by immersion, why wouldn’t you want to participate in a public baptism and invite your pastor?



Dear Jesus, thank you for giving me an example in baptism, of publically doing what was right, and blessing all who follow your example.



For Further Study: Matthew 3:13–17; John 3:1–22; Acts 2:41



Wasn't it too harsh to stone someone for breaking the Sabbath?

"Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ... Then the LORD said to Moses, 'The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp'" (Numbers 15:32, 35).



On the surface, this story seems to tell that an otherwise innocent person happened to be on a nice Sabbath afternoon walk and picked up a few sticks and, for such a simple act, was stoned to death.

But as we study the Scriptures carefully, we realize that God had already made it clear that a direct violation of the Sabbath was punishable by death. "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death" (Exodus 35:2).

The context of this event is that it comes directly after God's instructions relating to presumptuous sin. The dictionary defines presumption as "to undertake without leave or clear justification, to dare." God said, "The person who does anything presumptuously . . . that one brings reproach on the LORD, . . . he shall be cut off from among the people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment" (Numbers 15:30, 31).

This man clearly knew God's command and yet defiantly broke the law. He clearly and openly rebelled against God's instruction, setting a dangerous example of disobedience that had to be immediately arrested. Under the theocracy of Israel, God ruled over the people directly. Knowing the hearts of all, the Lord instructed immediate punishment for flagrant acts of disobedience.

Some believe that if Sabbathbreakers were stoned to death in the Old Testament, then the Sabbath must not be in force today since stoning for breaking it is not in force. But note that not only Sabbathbreakers were stoned, but adulterers (Leviticus 20:10) and blasphemers too (Leviticus 24:16). No one feels that these sins are any less wrong today simply because they aren't punishable by death.



Dear Father in heaven, may I always remember that all sin leads to death and that obedience brings life.





What does it mean when Christ says of those who go to hell, “Their worm does not die”?



“If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where ‘Their worm does not die’ ” (Mark 9:47, 48).

In this passage, the word “hell” is translated from the Greek word “gehenna,” which is another name for the valley of Hinnom, located just outside the walls of Jerusalem. There refuse and the bodies of animals were cast into an ever-smoldering fire to be consumed. What might escape the flames was constantly being destroyed by maggots, which fed on the dead bodies. Gehenna symbolized a place of total destruction.

Jesus taught here that the fires of hell could not be quenched or put out by anyone. Isaiah said, “Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame” (Isaiah 47:14). So the unquenchable fire will go out after it has consumed the wicked as stubble. Jerusalem burned with “unquenchable fire” according to Jeremiah 17:27 when it was totally destroyed. “It shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”

The flames and worms of gehenna represented the eradication of sin and sinners. Earlier apostasy and idol worship in the valley of Hinnom (Jeremiah 32:35), and God’s judgments on Israel as a consequence, marked it as a symbol of punishment and judgment. God warned in Jeremiah 7:31–33 that it would become the “Valley of Slaughter,” where the “corpses of this people will be food for the birds of heaven.” With the fires of “gehenna” burning before their eyes, Jesus could not have spoken a more graphic word to the Pharisees to describe the final, total destruction of sinners.

This text cannot support the idea of the immortal soul since the “worms” do not work on “disembodied souls.” According to Jesus, those who are cast into the lake of fire will go in bodily form. In Matthew 5:30, Christ said “It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for *your whole body* to be cast into hell” (my emphasis).



*Dear Lord, thank you that someday
you will destroy all sin forever.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 3:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What is the nature of the Trinity?

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).



This subject has been debated by the great minds of Christendom for nearly 2,000 years. When mortals try to describe God, all we can do is make our best attempt. If we could reach the farthest stars, maybe we could explain God. But we can't. The Bible does, however, tell us enough so we don't have to doubt.

God is a unit of three persons. "God" is a family word; He consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In John 3:16, we see that God the Father sent God the Son in the form of a human that we might be forgiven. At Jesus' baptism, you see these individuals again. The Father speaks from heaven saying, "This is my beloved son." Then the Spirit comes down in the form of a dove upon the Son. You've got the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all right there.

Some people are confused because Moses says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4). But the Bible also tells us, "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image'" (Genesis 1:26).

The word "one" in the Bible doesn't just mean one person; it can also mean one in unity or in purpose. Speaking of the apostles, Jesus prayed "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:21). Galatians 4:4–6 says, "God sent forth His Son . . . that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" Here you have God the Father sending the Son and sending the Spirit that we might reflect God the Son. There are many different titles used in the Bible for God, but there is only one God who is united in His purpose of saving you and me. That's the Trinity.



Our Triune God, we praise you for your great mercy and your united effort to save us. Thank you for giving us hope!



For Further Study: Matthew 3:16, 17; John 14:16

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What is the Christian's responsibility to the state?



"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).

First and foremost, every Christian needs to recognize that we are ambassadors of another kingdom. Even our giving should reflect a sacrifice to spread the message of the gospel that we love. But there are a number of other needs in the world, and Christians should be known as givers not only to our own causes, but also to various other causes in society. This might mean helping with community projects of various kinds.

No government can survive without supporting at least the last six of the Ten Commandments. It was no accident that God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone. Jewish tradition tells us that the Lord divided it this way: The first four, which deal with our relationship to God, are on the first table of stone; the last six, which deal with our relationships with our fellow man, are on the second table of stone.

I often hear religious leaders talk about "America returning to God" and that we need to require that people keep the Ten Commandments. That scares me, because if the government dictates that we're supposed to keep the first four, they're going to tell us what God to worship, what day to worship Him, how to worship Him, what His name is, and so on. The government should never be involved in enforcing the first four with civil penalties or laws.

On the other hand, if the government does not endorse the last six, you have anarchy. That's where I draw the line. There is a misconception in which people talk about Thomas Jefferson's reference to the wall of separation of church and state. He wasn't saying that religion and Christian principles should have no influence on government; he was saying that government should never dictate what the denomination of the state should be, which is what happened in Europe. But the morals of Christianity and Judeo-Christian ethics must influence government, because they encompass the foundational morals that are essential for the survival of any society.



Dear Lord, teach me how to give my first allegiance to you and also how to be a law-abiding citizen who benefits society.



For Further Study: Matthew 17:24–27; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–15



Isaiah 65 speaks of the new earth, yet it says that a child will die at 100 years old. What does this mean?

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isaiah 65:20).



This text has confused many Bible students. The wording seems to imply that death might still plague the saints in God’s new eternal world. But some scholars believe we need to look more closely at the context, which indicates a subjunctive form of speech. This would mean that the prophet was using human terminology to describe heavenly conditions. In other words, Isaiah was saying, “Should (or if) certain conditions prevail, then such and such would result.”

Here’s another translation that gives more of the poetic sense of the passage; from *The Message Bible*: “No more babies dying in the cradle, or old people who don’t enjoy a full lifetime; one-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—anything less will seem like a cheat.”

Isaiah was seeking to illustrate the facts of eternal life in heaven by earthly comparisons. Therefore, he had to call on his readers to imagine certain mortal conditions as being in the new earth so that they could grasp the truths of immortality. Poetic language can get us in trouble when we try to squeeze out a literal message that was never intended by the writer.

Another way to understand this passage is to recognize that prophecies often had multiple fulfillments. For instance, God’s Spirit was promised by Joel to be poured out in his time (Joel 2:28). Peter later applied this same promise to the early rain poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:17). But we also know that in the very last days of earth’s history, there will be a special outpouring of God’s Spirit, called the “latter rain” (James 5:7).

If Israel had fulfilled their promise after the Babylonian captivity and followed God’s ways, then in a local sense this Bible verse would have been fulfilled; yet it still has a greater and universal application when Jesus comes.



Lord, I long for the day when the earth will be made new and death will be banished forever.





Why did Jesus say “let the dead bury their own dead”?



“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60).

Christ was not indifferent to the pain people experience when loved ones pass away. Jesus once halted a funeral procession in Nain and raised a widow's only son (Luke 7:11–15). He went out of His way to raise a ruler's little girl who had died (Matthew 9:18–26). His heart was wrenched with grief over the death of Lazarus (John 11:35).

The context of Luke 9 is the cost of following Christ. Here we find excuses made by people who did not have a deep commitment to Jesus. Luke 9:59 reveals one man's response to Christ's call of discipleship. From the wording of this passage, it seems apparent that the man's father was not yet dead. “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” If the father had been dead, the son would have had no opportunity to accompany Christ and the disciples. In that hot country, with no embalming, bodies had to be buried immediately. The man was asking to postpone following the Lord until his father had passed away and been buried.

Christ's answer exposed the man as a procrastinator. The same message is given to another man in verse 61, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” Notice the priority of both men: “Let me first. . .” Nothing must stand in the way of the call of Jesus. The issue in these verses is not about grieving the loss of our loved ones or saying a proper farewell to our guests. Jesus is exposing unnecessary excuses for putting off following Him.

Christ said, “Let the dead bury their own dead.” In other words, those who are spiritually dead do not respond to the urgency of making a decision to follow Jesus. There are always “good reasons” for people to say, “Not now; I have more important matters to attend to.”

Is anything more important than committing our lives to Christ? People who delay often forget or lose interest. It can cost them eternal life.



*Dear Lord, may nothing come before
my daily choice to follow you.*



For Further Study: Matthew 12:48, 49; Luke 18:18–23; 1 Timothy 5:6



When a baby sins, is it because of his own sin or Adam's inherited sin?

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
(Romans 3:23).



This is kind of a loaded question, because a baby is obviously not born with a sinful record. If a baby in a Christian family dies, those parents will see that baby in the resurrection. But if the baby lives on, we know what happens. Every human is born with a sinful nature, and we all have sinful tendencies.

The Bible says, "All have sinned." Now this means committed sin. That baby, eventually, will understand the difference between right and wrong and likely will choose wrong at some point, because that's what our sinful nature leads us to do.

Some have also wondered what the age of accountability is, but the Bible is not specific on this subject. However, in the wilderness experience, those who didn't believe perished in the wilderness—and this included anybody that was 20 years or older. I don't believe you could fight in the army until you were 20 years of age. And in the Jewish culture, a boy is considered a man when he turns 12. He can go to the temple and participate in the services. So I would conclude that somewhere between 10 and 20, a young man or woman becomes accountable for sin.

People often wonder about Jesus' life as a baby. He was born with a clean record—and every baby on entrance into this world is sparkling clean as far as the record of sin. However, we are born selfish creatures. Jesus was born with the same potential to sin as you and I have. That's why the Bible says He was "tempted in all points, even as we are." The only difference is this: He didn't sin. That's why He can be our High Priest and Advocate. He was not born as some kind of superman—immune to any kind of contamination. He wrestled with temptation, but He never gave in, giving us an example that if He could overcome by trusting the Father, we also can overcome by trusting Him.



Dear Jesus, thank you for resisting all temptations to fulfill your mission of saving me. And thank you that I can overcome my temptations by trusting in you.



For Further Study: Matthew 4:1–11; Romans 5:12–19; Hebrews 4:15

Scan for more on this topic. ►





Is the communion service only open to those who are members of a church and whose sins are forgiven?



"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28).

There are indeed times in which the church should examine a person, such as in choosing officers or preparing baptismal candidates. But the apostle Paul also encourages us to inwardly examine our hearts. He doesn't say in this text to "examine others." The communion service is a time for personal reflection and self-examination. There is no biblical precedence to review each person before a committee before allowing them to participate in this rite.

It certainly is interesting that Jesus allowed Judas to participate in the Lord's Supper even though He knew that Judas was stealing and about to betray Him. He did not forbid Judas despite these sins. As a matter of fact, Christ even washed the man's feet. I believe communion should be redemptive in nature.

Yet the Bible also says we should not eat the bread or drink the blood to our own condemnation. Paul states in the previous verse, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27), and later, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (v. 29).

It's a very common characteristic to notice people's problems that we see on the outside but not recognize the hurt that's on the inside. When people come to communion, they're looking for cleansing, forgiveness, and healing, and we need to allow that miracle to transpire.

I pastor at a church that practices what is called "open communion." This means we allow individuals to judge themselves, and we do not police the hearts of our members and guests. Remember that Jesus is the example we must follow, and He did not decide who should and should not. So I think a church is more biblical if they practice open communion.



Search me, O God, and know my heart, that I may receive your deep cleansing in every area of my life.



For Further Study: Matthew 26:26–30; 1 Corinthians 11:17–22; Galatians 6:4



Will Elijah come back before Jesus returns to the earth?

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5, 6).



Some believe that this text teaches that Elijah will be reincarnated before the second coming of Christ. But notice what Jesus said in His day: “I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:12, 13).

You might also remember that even though Jesus said that John was Elijah, John himself strongly denied it. When religious leaders approached him, notice his candid response: “They asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not’” (John 1:21).

This sounds a bit perplexing, doesn’t it? But now let’s read two texts that explain this riddle. Even before his birth, it was prophesied of John that he would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16, 17).

Instead of John actually being Elijah, John’s work was to be in the “spirit and power” of Elijah.

Jesus clarified this when He said, concerning John’s ministry, “If you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:14). This makes it clear that John’s message was the Elijah message for his day. It was given in the spirit, power, and boldness of Elijah’s call to repentance. Just before Jesus comes, another message of equal power and boldness will be given to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.



Dear Father, may I be prepared to receive the Elijah message that will turn my heart toward you in a deeper way.





Weren't the Ten Commandments part of the old covenant that was abolished at the cross?



"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone" (Deuteronomy 4:13).

Some Christians teach that the Ten Commandments are a core part of the old covenant, which was abolished. Yet even though the Ten Commandments were indeed a commanded covenant, they did not constitute the old covenant that vanished away (Hebrews 8:13). Here are some reasons:

1. The old covenant was faulty, had poor promises, and vanished away (Hebrews 8:7, 8, 13). None of those points apply to the perfect law of God (Psalm 19:7).
2. The old covenant was made based on the Israelites' promise to keep God's commandments in their own strength (Exodus 24:7, 8). It was not the law itself.
3. Referring to the Ten Commandments, God said to Moses, "According to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel" (Exodus 34:27, 28). It was not the law itself but the promise to keep the law.
4. Moses referred to the golden calf as "your sin, the calf which you had made" (Deuteronomy 9:21). The calf was not the sin, but the sin took place concerning the calf. In the same way, the old covenant was not the law, but it was *concerning* the law. Thus it is called the covenant.
5. Romans 9:4 shows that the old and new covenants were different from the law itself: "... who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises." Here the law is listed, as well as the covenants (plural). This would include both old and new covenants, plus the "giving of the law," which are the Ten Commandments.
6. To demonstrate how the law is not the old covenant, let's interchange some words in Romans 3:31 and see what happens: "Do we then make void the (old covenant) through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the (old covenant)." That obviously doesn't make much sense, does it?



Lord, write your law in my heart. I want to renew my commitment to obey you through the power of Jesus' life in me.



For Further Study: Hebrews 8:10; Ezekiel 36:26; Psalm 40:8

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Why did God allow the babies to be killed under Herod's decree—and will they be saved?

"Thus says the LORD: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.' Thus says the LORD: 'Refrain ... your eyes from tears. ... There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border'" (Jeremiah 31:15–17).



Jeremiah indicates here that the babies Herod murdered will be resurrected. It speaks of "Rachel weeping for her children ... because they were not." But then God speaks hope: "Your children shall come back to their own border." The Bible also seems to teach that children, before the age of accountability, are sanctified by believing parents (1 Corinthians 7:14). However, I don't know if God has a standard law that says all babies who die before the age of accountability will be resurrected.

Many people wonder why God allows the innocent to suffer. The truth is, a tyrant called the devil has kidnapped this world, and he does not play by the rules. The world rejected the leadership of God when Adam and Eve sinned. Now God intervenes only when we pray and ask Him to. Even Jesus referred to the devil as "the prince of this world" (John 14:30 KJV).

During the temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4:9, the devil took Jesus up to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and said, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Satan claims this world as his own. So it should not surprise us when we see the innocent suffering at the hands of the wicked. Remember that the penalty of sin is death, but God, in His mercy, has not executed the planet's people because He's seeking to save as many as He can. So instead of asking the question, "Why do innocent people like the babies in Bethlehem suffer?" we ought to be asking, "Why is God so merciful that He sought to preserve and save so many?"



Dear God, thank you for your great love for me, for wanting to save me. Help me to reflect your mercy to those around me.





Is it bad for a Christian to see a good movie?



“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

What we put into our minds is extremely important as it affects our spiritual lives. The vast majority of movies do not fit the Bible’s criteria of what we should allow into our minds. Many movies that are considered “good” movies have themes that are contrary to the Bible and Christian life.

Scripture tells us that we “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Looking at Christ makes us more like Christ, but the opposite applies as well. What we look at has a definite affect on our thoughts, beliefs, motivations, goals, and characters. Most movies feature violence, sexual content, and foul language—things that Christians should steer away from. None of this can help us become more like Christ.

But suppose there is an innocent, G-rated film that you would like to see. What’s wrong with going to the theater to watch it? There are a couple of things you might want to consider. First, if you go to a G-rated movie, you will still expose yourself to advertisements and previews that are not so wholesome, and you might be tempted to come back and see a bad movie. In other words, it opens the door for compromise.

Also, as a Christian, you want to set a good example for others. If someone you know sees you going into a theater, they don’t know what movie you’re there to see. They could actually use your mere presence at the cinema as an excuse to attend another movie of their choice. The apostle Paul put it this way: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).



Dear Father, please help me turn away from entertainment that opposes Christian values. Instead, may I spend my free time in activities that bring me closer to you.



For Further Study: James 4:4



What does Isaiah 45:7 mean when it says God creates calamity?

*“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things”
(Isaiah 45:7).*



You can couple this verse with the Bible story in which Micaiah the prophet reports that he saw the Lord send a lying spirit to the prophets of Ahab. In these passages and in others, it appears that evil is proceeding from God, yet the Bible says that every good and perfect gift comes from God.

In the book of Job, you find the key that unlocks this relationship between good and evil and God's involvement. The devil is asking permission of God to tempt and torment Job. The devil cannot do anything without God allowing it. The Lord must withdraw His protection, He must lift the hedge, and He must pull back His protective forces. In that sense, it appears that God is allowing evil. The Lord is the one who placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden. That doesn't mean the Lord wants us to “eat” evil. It means that He gives us the freedom to choose.

Sometimes the Lord withdraws His angels that protect us, and in that sense, you could say that He is allowing evil to come. But the book of James tells us that the Lord Himself does not tempt anyone, neither can He be tempted. The devil is an individual being, roaming about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may destroy and devour. God is constantly putting him in check, to the degree of what He allows the devil to do.

From time to time, the Lord draws back His hand of protection to accomplish some purpose. This is why Paul says, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able” (1 Corinthians 10:13). So when Isaiah says that evil comes from the Lord, it simply means that the devil can't do anything unless God allows it in His sovereign plan.



Dear God, thank you that your sovereign plan includes only what is for our ultimate benefit.





Didn't Jesus assure the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in paradise that very day?



"Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise' " (Luke 23:43).

Some believe from this verse that people go to their reward immediately after death, a teaching that goes contrary to many other Bible texts. There are two main problems with this assumption. First, even though Jesus told the thief, "today you will be with Me in Paradise," three days later He told Mary, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17).

Where is the Father, and where is paradise? The Bible tells us, "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). God's throne is shown in Revelation 22:1, 2, to be in heaven near the tree of life.

The second problem comes from when Jesus and the thief died. When the soldiers came just before sunset to take the bodies off the crosses, Jesus was already dead (John 19:32–34). Since the thieves were still alive, the soldiers broke their legs to speed up their deaths. It is very possible they lived until past sundown and possibly longer. So how could Christ assure the thief of "being with Him" in paradise "that day" when they both did not die on "that day"?

The solution to this dilemma is most clearly resolved by studying what the Bible teaches about the state of the dead. I won't take time to cover that topic here, but the Scriptures clearly state that until the coming of Christ, the dead are in their graves, not in paradise (see John 11:11–14; 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16).

It's also important to remember that uninspired men added punctuation to our English Bibles when they were translated. The commas in this verse were not in the original manuscripts. Someone simply placed a comma before the word "today" instead of after it. The verse is more clearly translated as, "I assure you today, you will be with Me in Paradise."



Dear Jesus, I want to be ready when you come in your kingdom and glory.



For Further Study: John 14:1–3; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23; Ecclesiastes 12:7

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible teach that the body and soul are separate entities?

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).



The first thing we should notice in this text is that the “soul” and “body” are “destroyed” in hell. This means the soul is *not* naturally immortal. Only God is naturally eternal (1 Timothy 6:15, 16). But what does Jesus mean about killing the body but not the soul? Is it possible for the soul to exist apart from the body? Some say it is, but the Bible indicates otherwise.

The Greek word *psuche* has been translated as “soul” in this text, but in many other texts, it has been translated as “life.” For example, Jesus said, “Whosoever will lose his life (*psuche*) for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). The idea of an immaterial soul that is separate from the body is a common belief among many today, but you won’t find it in the Bible.

But what about Matthew 10:28? Put in the word “life” instead of “soul” and the text makes perfect sense and is consistent with the rest of the Bible. The contrast is between one who can take the physical life and Him who can take away eternal life. Proof lies in the words of Jesus: “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4, 5).

In other words, the word “soul” here means not only life, but *eternal* life. Notice how Luke’s passage parallels Matthew’s except that he does not say “kill the soul,” but “cast into hell.” They mean the same thing. Men can only kill the body and take away the physical life. But God has the power to cast into hell and take away eternal life.



Dear Lord, may I never fear what others might do to me. May my supreme focus be to please you, the one who can save my life from eternal death!



For Further Study: Ezekiel 18:4; Genesis 3:4; Romans 6:23

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Where is the line between persisting in prayer and vain repetition?



*“When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him”
(Matthew 6:7, 8).*

Payer is not for informing God; rather, it draws us up to God. The Lord wants us to pray to Him for our benefit, and not because He wouldn't know what's going on if we didn't pray. It binds us to God. He knows what you need even before you ask, so the Lord lays certain burdens on our heart, and as long as those burdens are there, we should keep praying for them.

The heathen would utter the same prayer several times in one sitting. That's not prayer. Prayer is the intelligent cry of your heart to the heart of God. Prayer elevates you. When you pray, you should think about the prayer and what you're saying really means.

The Greek word for “vain repetitions” is only found in this one place in the New Testament. It means “to babble” and to “rattle off without giving much thought to what is being said.” Is this how Jesus wants us to pray? What follows in verses 9–13 is a simple example of how we might pray. But it's not intended to be a magic formula that will do wonders if we vainly repeat it.

There are some Christian denominations that tell people that when they sin, they should say a certain prayer over and over again in order to right the wrong they did. That's not biblical.

Then you've got people like Elijah who knelt down and, seven times, asked God to send the rain. I don't think he prayed the exact same prayer seven times. Rather, seven different times he pled with the Lord to fulfill His Word and send the rain. People who have children wandering from God pray for their salvation every day. That's not praying in vain repetition. You can be sure that Jesus prayed for the disciples every day (John 17).



Dear heavenly Father, may my prayers to you be meaningful, genuine, and directly from my heart.



For Further Study: 1 Kings 18:26; Acts 19:34; Matthew 26:44

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What are some biblical tips to dealing with personal anger?

"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" (Hebrews 4:13).



The first step for dealing with any bad habit or sin is to acknowledge it. When you admit to yourself and to God that you have a problem with anger, you've taken a big step. Being honest with God is necessary if you're going to deal with this issue.

Some people don't see their anger as a problem. While everyone, at some time or another, gets upset, this emotion can lead to some serious consequences. Paul writes, "'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26, 27). If we do not handle our anger properly, it gives Satan a foothold into our lives.

You might even feel that you have a right to be angry, but if it continues to live in your heart, it will eventually destroy you. "So then, 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" (James 1:19, 20). Jesus also warned, "I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:22).

Ask yourself, "Why am I angry?" You might be allowing other people to control you and need to draw boundaries with them. It might be that you've genuinely been hurt and need to work something through. But as you deal with your anger, don't let your emotions completely take control of your thinking. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

Turn your anger over to God in prayer (Proverbs 15:1). Forgive people who have wounded you (Ephesians 4:32). Ask God to forgive you for being angry (1 John 1:9). And don't let it grow into a root of bitterness that will defile you and others around you (Hebrews 12:15).



Dear Jesus, cleanse my heart of all anger and fill me with peace.





Does John 9:31 teach that God doesn't hear sinners?



"Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31).

The context for this verse comes from the story of Jesus healing a man who was born blind. At the start of the narrative, the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). The response that Christ gives helps us understand God's view of sinners and sin. "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him'" (v.3).

After Christ healed the blind man, the Pharisees got wind of the incident and questioned the healed man. His answered caused division. One group said of Jesus, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (v.16). The healed man's statement in John 9:31 actually agrees with this Pharisee's statement. They couldn't argue with his reasoning. God heard Jesus, the Man without sin, and the blind man was healed.

So does this verse mean that God *never* hears a sinner's cry for help? Of course not; there are too many stories and Bible verses that show sinful people crying out to God for help and the Lord hearing them. The classic story of a sinner calling out to God and being heard is found in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. Notice the publican's prayer, "The tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13). Jesus then says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified" (v.14).

It is not a deficiency on the part of God to hear sinners, but a reluctance on the part of sinners to turn to the Lord for help. David once said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). Sinners who persistently turn away from God will not be heard because they are not even calling to Him.



Dear Jesus, thank you that my every cry for help is heard by you.



For Further Study: Matthew 7:7; Romans 8:32; Psalm 147:3



Has God predestined certain people to be saved and others to be lost?

*“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”
(2 Peter 3:9).*



Some people interpret Matthew 22:14, which says that “many are called, but few are chosen,” to mean that God has chosen some individuals to be saved and some not to be saved. They assert that since Romans 9:13 says that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, it means He didn’t want Esau to be saved. Therefore, Esau was “predestined” to be lost.

I respectfully disagree. When the Lord says, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” that could be translated as “but few respond.” The apostle John defines how many people God wants to save: “For God so loved the *world*. . .” (John 3:16, my emphasis). He further states that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” We all have been given the freedom to believe and choose whether or not to be saved. God does not force us.

Try to picture a traffic helicopter hovering over a section of a mountain highway in which there are two lanes going opposite directions through a tunnel. The person in the helicopter is looking down and sees that a little red Volkswagen is getting ready to pass an 18-wheeler inside the tunnel. But coming up the other side of the mountain is another 18-wheeler in the oncoming lane. It hasn’t happened yet, but that pilot can safely report that there’s going to be an accident in the tunnel. The helicopter pilot is not making it happen, but he sees that it’s going to happen. To say that the pilot predestined the crash is absurd, of course.

God knows all things. He does not want there to be a crash in the tunnel, but He sees it coming. A person needs to understand that the Lord longs for everyone to be saved and wants all people to come to repentance. God is love and doesn’t want any person to perish.



Dear Jesus, thank you for giving your life for me. Today I choose you to be my Savior.



For Further Study: 1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 1 John 4:8; Revelation 22:17

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What does the Bible say about women as church leaders or preachers?



*“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess. ... She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day”
(Luke 2:36, 37).*

God made men and women as equal creatures. I do not believe there is a distinction between men and women in their value to God and their accessibility to salvation. They're both perfectly equal.

Furthermore, God ministers through both men and women. You read in the Bible about both men and women teaching and preaching, in the capacity of prophets and evangelists, or giving Bible studies, as Priscilla did with her husband, Aquila (Acts 18:26). However, there is no example in the Bible of a woman serving in the capacity of priest, pastor, or elder.

When Jesus chose the 12 disciples, I do not believe He was merely accommodating the traditions of the day when He selected only men. Several offices have uniquely male symbolism. For example, the men were to be the priests of their families. That means servant-leaders, not dictators or despots. Consider Moses' family: Amram and Jochebed had three children: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. All three were prophets. Their sons both served as priests, but Miriam did not. She was a prophetess, but not a priest. She led the women in prophetic songs and in teaching.

You've read about Anna in the temple (Luke 2:36, 37) and Deborah as a prophetess and a judge in Israel (Judges 4:4), but you've never read of women offering a sacrifice. In the Bible, a priest is a male role because he symbolizes Jesus, our High Priest. A similar distinction was made for the Passover sacrifice. The Israelites were instructed to take a male lamb because it was a symbol for Christ.

God has distinctions in the genders and in roles within the family. I don't think these identities evaporate when people walk through the doors of the church, which is really an extension of the individual family unit.



*Dear Lord, thank you for giving gifts and ministries
to all the members in your church body.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 5:23–25; 1 Timothy 2:12; Titus 1:6; 1 Corinthians 11:3–16
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



In Genesis 4:14, who is Cain worried will kill him?

"A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth"
(Genesis 4:12).



Because of his intense jealousy toward Abel, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him. Afterward, he tried to play innocent, but God already knew what had happened. He pronounced a curse on Cain: "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and vagabond you shall be on the earth." He was driven away.

Cain then responds, "Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me" (verse 14). In this passage, Cain wasn't concerned about his sin, but about his punishment. He was saying it was more than he could bear, and he feared people were going to hunt him down and kill him.

Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel understood that they had been commanded to "be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:22). Cain knew that in the process of time, men and women would procreate and there would be thousands upon thousands of people in the world. Do you realize how many people could have been born in the 900 years from that time until the Flood? It was likely in the millions!

Cain knew that he would be an outlaw—public enemy number one. He was anticipating that people would hunt him down and kill him as they multiplied and spread across the Earth. He made that statement because he was anticipating what was going to happen as the planet became more populated.

Since we don't have an exact timeline of the first family, it is also possible that Adam and Eve already had other grown children as well. Cain might have feared one of his brothers or sisters would immediately take revenge on behalf of their murdered brother.

God, in His mercy, put a mark on Cain to protect him from any would-be avengers.



Lord, thank you for showing me, even through this tragic story, that your mercy is great. Thank you for showing me compassion every day.





Does Paul teach that we should “hold the traditions” of the church?



*“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle”
(2 Thessalonians 2:15).*

The Greek word translated “traditions” is *paradosis*, which means “things handed over” or “passed down.” There are many traditions based on error and false theories; these are condemned in the Bible because they contradict the truth of God. For instance, Jesus once stated, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (Matthew 15:13).

The apostle Paul makes a distinction about different types of tradition. He writes to the church at Colossae, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to *the tradition of men*, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8, my emphasis). Not all traditions are the same.

The traditions in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 were those handed over by Christ and the apostles. Paul does not endorse *all* traditions. He teaches us to “hold fast” to those traditions the church had received “by word or our epistle.” This encompasses only the inspired teachings or writings of those who had received their message from Christ and were ministering to the churches at that time.

Since there were so many false teachers around and poisoning the minds of people, the apostle took pains to clarify that not all traditions or teachings are sound. He once said to the church in Galatia, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Just because someone says, “But the church says” or “My pastor says,” it does not mean it is truth. There certainly are good traditions, but if they contradict the Bible, they should be laid aside. Jesus once asked, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Some issues are pretty minor, but when it comes to weighty matters of teaching, it is better to have a “Thus says the Lord.”



*Dear Lord, help me to weigh every tradition with
your Word and hold fast only to what is good.*



For Further Study: 2 Timothy 4:2–4; 1 Corinthians 11:2; Matthew 15:6



Doesn't Luke 16:16 mean Jesus did away with the Old Testament?

"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it" (Luke 16:16).



In this verse, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees "who were lovers of money" (v. 14). Christ had just rebuked those who worshiped "mammon" (v. 13). He now turns to these religious leaders who "heard all these things and they derided Him" (v. 14). Notice Jesus' pointed words: "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (v. 15).

The Pharisees felt no need of Christ. They were blind to His role as the Messiah, who not only fulfilled Old Testament symbols, but had now come to announce the kingdom of God. They scorned the messages of Jesus and were jealous of the growing numbers who turned away from them to this new teacher. The Pharisees claimed to stand firmly on the law and the prophets, but Jesus showed how their self-justifying spirit fell flat before God.

To paraphrase Luke 16:16, "The Old Testament Scriptures bring us up to the time of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Messiah." The verse then says, "Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it." Jesus was telling them, "The law and the prophets on which you think you so firmly stand points to My coming, yet you reject Me and are jealous of all the people who are turning to my preaching."

Jesus repeatedly upheld the law (Matthew 5:17), as did the other writers of the New Testament (Acts 26:22). The Old Testament was a sufficient guide to lead people to heaven (Luke 16:19–31). The church found its strongest confirmation of faith in Christ through the prophecies of the Old Testament (Acts 7:37). The phrase in Luke 16:16, "Since that time," refers to the time since John the Baptist began to preach and call attention to the coming of Jesus and the greater light He would bring to the world.



Dear Jesus, give me eyes to see you as the true light that shines in our world.



For Further Study: Romans 3:1, 2; Luke 24:27; Acts 28:23

Scan for more on this topic. ▶



How do you differentiate between opinion and fact when it comes to discerning between Bible-believing churches and off-the-wall cults?



*“Test all things; hold fast what is good”
(1 Thessalonians 5:21).*

The answer to this is really quite simple. When prayerfully and faithfully comparing Scriptures to one another, you'll see the picture God wants you to see. It's like putting a puzzle together piece by piece. If you have to jam pieces into place, you're doing something wrong. They should fit easily together; there's searching involved, yes, but you shouldn't have to force the text. We must let the Bible interpret itself.

So Bible-believing churches should base their conclusions on what the Bible says, without allowing an individual or group of people to interpret everything for its members. Several members should study the Bible and bounce ideas off one another. The Bible says, “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14).

Cults are classified as such because an elite person or inner circle does all the thinking for the followers—even when members disagree, they can't challenge or take a stand against the leadership. People who blindly follow this kind of practice without Bible study are in danger of being lost!

A cult also forbids members from looking at outside literature. Some have come knocking on my door wanting to study the Bible with me. They are almost always sincere, and I admire their enthusiasm. But before they leave, I offer them a book. Yet they won't dare take it, because their church is afraid that their doctrines won't stand up under scrutiny. A challenge to the church is forbidden.

The Bible says, “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” (1 John 4:1). We ought to prove all things, so we need to keep our eyes open. You don't need to look at garbage, but you must examine and evaluate truth, holding fast to the good. With heartfelt prayer and study, God will lead you.



*Dear Jesus, help me to test every spiritual teaching
I hear with the Word of God and never to be led
astray by the false teachings of imperfect people.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 28:9; Matthew 7:20



Were there two sets of cherubim in the temple?

“The wings of the cherubim were twenty cubits in overall length: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, touching the wall of the room, and the other wing was five cubits, touching the wing of the other cherub; one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, touching the wall of the room, and the other wing also was five cubits, touching the wing of the other cherub” (2 Chronicles 3:11, 12).



The Bible says that the cherubim inside the most holy place of the tabernacle were on top of the ark, facing toward the center with their faces down and their wings over it. When Solomon rebuilt the temple, he put in a set of cherubim with wingspans of five cubits (2 Chronicles 3:11, 12). Were there two sets of cherubim in the temple when Solomon finished rebuilding it?

When the Lord instructed Moses to make the first tabernacle, it was made small and simple so as to be portable enough to carry it through the wilderness desert and into the Promised Land. When Solomon built the permanent temple in Jerusalem, the cherubim in the holy of holies were made larger, with wings that stretched completely over the ark.

The Bible doesn't mention a second set of cherubim like the ones atop the ark of the covenant. However, angels were depicted throughout the structure—woven into the veil (verse 14) and engraved in solid gold plating on the walls (v. 7) and temple doors (1 Kings 6:31–35)—all to represent the very real angels that continually surround God's heavenly throne. The two angels that stand by the throne of God are the covering cherubs, and these special beings were symbolized in the earthly temple as the angels standing over the ark. These two cherubim are by no means the only angels in heaven.

Daniel 7:10 tells us about a “thousand thousands” ministering to God and 10,000 times 10,000 standing before Him. The prophet Daniel saw these ministering spirits surrounding the dwelling place of God. The golden cherubs in the temple were miniature models to help us picture the dwelling place of our God in heaven.



Dear Father, help me to reverence you as your holy angels do. May I always bow before you in awe and gratitude.





Does the Bible teach that all meats were pronounced clean by Christ?



“He said to them, ‘Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?’” (Mark 7:18, 19).

Some Bible translators modify these words saying “thus purifying all foods.” For instance, in the English Standard Version, it is marked as “(Thus he declared all foods clean.)” But this is not at all intended in the original Greek.

The question being considered had nothing to do with any particular food, but rather eating without ceremonially washed hands. The word used for “purifying” in this verse comes from the Greek “katharizo,” which is where we get the word “cauterize,” meaning to burn or purge. Jesus was explaining that what you eat with dirty hands does not defile you because it basically passes through your digestive system and purges or purifies the food.

The Pharisees believed that if you ate food with “unwashed” hands, you would become defiled by the Gentiles, who might have touched you or your food. It’s really a “how you eat” question, not a “what you eat” debate. Jesus was teaching that people who are overly concerned about being defiled by touching something need to understand that sin has more to do with the mind and heart.

Another way to clarify this issue is by considering the word for “meat” in the King James Bible. The original Greek word, *broma*, is better translated as “food.” Further evidence that Jesus did not discard the health laws is found in the apostle Peter’s comment in the book of Acts, which took place many years after Jesus’ statement in Mark. He tells the Lord, “I have never eaten anything common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Peter’s experience in Acts also did not have anything to do with actual food.

Jesus was telling people that the man-made laws of the Pharisees regarding endless ceremonial washings were unnecessary. Bumping into a Gentile did not make you or your dishes unclean. Spending lots of time washing cups and plates missed the more important message of having a clean heart.



*Dear Jesus, wash my heart clean. Purify my motives.
Cleanse me from all unrighteousness today.*



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 3:17; 10:31

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Is keeping the seventh-day Sabbath necessary for salvation?

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11).



Since the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments, I approach it the same way I approach the other nine. The more crucial question we should ask ourselves is this: “Am I keeping God’s commandments to be saved, or am I seeking to keep God’s commandments because I am saved.” The answer to this question will reveal your theology of salvation.

Think about it this way: If I say that I’m saved, but I steal from work and have a wife on each coast, my relationship with the Lord is questionable, isn’t it? There will be people in heaven who had several wives because they did not know the truth regarding this—consider King David, Solomon, and Abraham. That doesn’t mean God condones polygamy. In the same way, there will be people in heaven who went to church on Sunday, and maybe those who didn’t go to church at all, because they didn’t know the truth about God’s holy day.

But when a person knows God’s will in any of these areas and says, “I’m not going to obey this or that commandment for my own reasons,” then the Bible’s message is clear. If we purposefully sin when we have a clear understanding of God’s requirements, there are serious consequences. “If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26). While keeping the Sabbath won’t save you, the idea that you can willfully break God’s commandments and still be saved is just not biblical.



*Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of the Sabbath,
a day to remind me that I may rest in you.*



For Further Study: Romans 3:28–31; Hebrews 10:7; John 14:15

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





If we believe Jesus is coming soon, is it a lack of faith for us to prepare for retirement?



"He called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come' " (Luke 19:13).

Planning for retirement doesn't represent a lack of faith. I believe Christians should have a relationship with the Lord in which they remember they could die at any moment or that Jesus could come at any time, yet plan for the future as though this planet could last another hundred years.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 19:12–27 about a ruler who went away on a long trip but promised to return. Before he left, the man called 10 of his servants and gave them a very large sum of money. His parting instructions were, "Do business till I come" (verse 13). In other words, Jesus was telling His disciples to stay busy, invest, and plan for the future.

For example, if you're going to build a house, don't build it to last only five years even if you believe the Lord is coming soon. My advice is to dig deep and build your foundation well. The Bible says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

I once heard a story that helps to illustrate this point. A young monk living in a monastery was reading some of the Scriptures chained to the wall that told about the imminence of Christ's coming. He got very excited and ran out to St. Francis, who was harvesting peas in the garden. The young monk exclaimed, "Jesus is coming!"

"Yes, my son," St. Francis replied.

"He's coming soon," emphasized the young man.

Saint Francis acknowledged, "I know, my son."

"Well," asked the monk, "how can you just stand there and harvest your peas? What if He was coming tomorrow? What would you be doing now?"

"Well, first I'd finish harvesting the peas," St. Francis answered.

That's the attitude I think Christians should have. Be faithful in what lies closest to you, because we don't know the day or the hour of Jesus' return (Mark 13:32–33).



Dear Lord, whatever I do today, may I be found faithfully carrying out my duties for your glory.



For Further Study: Jeremiah 29:11; Proverbs 13:22; Numbers 8:23–26



Does the Bible teach that Christians are incapable of committing sin?

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).



The key to understanding this text lies in the meaning of the word “seed.” There is an assurance that this “seed” will provide total victory over sin. Who is this “seed” whose presence in our lives can guarantee the strength to obey? We find the answer in Revelation 12:17: “The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest her [seed], who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The seed of the woman was the male child of verse 5, “who was to rule all nations” and “was caught up unto God.” Christ is this seed! You find the same teaching in the apostle Paul’s writings when he says of Abraham, “And to your Seed, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

Now we can better catch the beautiful truth in 1 John 3:9. Those who are truly born of God do not *willfully* sin, because Christ is enthroned in their hearts. The only way they can choose to sin is by separating from Jesus. In other words, the abiding presence of Christ and the willful commission of sin cannot happen simultaneously in the same heart at the same time. Deliberate sin always separates us from Christ, and the Holy Spirit does not become a minister of sin. On the other hand, those who are genuinely converted and have the indwelling of the Spirit will be able to overcome sin in all its forms.

This text does not mean that Christians are incapable of committing wrong acts; rather, their love for Christ keeps them from walking contrary to His will. The word “sin” here is in a Greek form that indicates a continuing process. In other words, even if they stumble into a sin, they will not continue such a course; rather, they will sincerely repent and turn from any willful violation of God’s revealed will.



Dear Jesus, please enter my heart to stay, that I may forever hate sin and love to obey your commands.





How could Jesus be “the firstborn from the dead” when others were raised from the dead before He was?



*“From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth”
(Revelation 1:5).*

The expression “firstborn from the dead” in reference to Christ has caused some people a little confusion. Obviously, Jesus was not the first one to be resurrected. Besides Moses in the Old Testament, at least three individuals were raised from the dead by Jesus Himself.

There are two ways the word “first” here could be understood. It can mean either first in point of time or first in preeminence. The U.S. President’s wife is spoken of as the First Lady—not because she is the first lady who existed, but first in honor. King David explains this well when he writes in the same vein, “I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Psalm 89:27). It is in this way that Jesus is the foremost, the greatest, the chief, the finest, the most supreme, and the most excellent in the universe.

Christ was “firstborn from the dead” because His resurrection took preeminence over all other resurrections. In truth, all other resurrections had taken place or would take place by virtue of His triumph over the grave. Jesus’ power to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:17) set Him apart from all others who had been resurrected. His was *first* in importance to such a degree that no other, ever, could have been raised without reference to His resurrection.

All resurrections, before and after Christ, rest on His supreme resurrection. It is the source of freedom from the tomb. The bonds of death are broken because He was victorious over the grave and now has the right to give us eternal life. Some have been resurrected, but only Jesus can unlock the tomb. Only He can say, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:18).



*Dear Jesus, because of your death and resurrection,
I may live in faith that the grave is not the end.
There is a bright morning I can look forward to.*



For Further Study: Romans 8:29; John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15:12–23



What day of the week was Pentecost?

"You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain" (Deuteronomy 16:9).



Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15–21), occurred on what we would call Sunday and was a celebration of the spring harvest. The root word "pente" means five; for example, a pentagon has five sides. After Passover, there are seven weeks, and after the last Passover Sabbath, which is the 49th day, comes the day of Pentecost. The word literally means "fiftieth day."

Unfortunately, some people use this ceremonial day as a justification for going to church on Sunday, ignoring the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. But that is quite a stretch. There is nothing in the Bible that says to keep Pentecost, Sunday, or even the day of Jesus' resurrection holy as a replacement for the seventh-day Sabbath.

By that logic, we could keep Thursday as the Sabbath because that's when the Lord instituted the New Covenant at the Lord's Supper. You could even argue that it should be Friday, because that's when Jesus was crucified.

But nowhere in the Bible does God pick any other day to replace the seventh day. I think it's pretty reckless for Christians to start altering the law of God, the one He spoke with His voice and wrote with His finger. Jesus said, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3).

If you can show me a Scripture that says, "Keep the first day as the Sabbath," then I'll do just that. But until I find it, should I take men's traditions over the very clear Word of God? The Bible says that the Lord blessed and sanctified the *seventh* day. He wrote it in stone with His finger; He spoke it with His voice, saying, "Remember," meaning that we're not to forget it. We can't simply ignore the Word of God. "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).



Dear heavenly Father, help me to weigh every teaching by the Word of God and never substitute the Bible with the traditions of mere humans.



For Further Study: Acts 20:7; Genesis 2:1–3; Colossians 2:18–22

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Can you think a sin?



"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Let's see what Jesus says about sin in the mind. In Matthew 5:21, our Lord says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." I don't believe He's actually calling someone like this a murderer; rather, He's discussing the significance of thinking angry thoughts.

Now jump down to verses 27 and 28. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Here the Lord is telling us that sin is not always an action; it can be an attitude. It can be a thought.

On another occasion, Jesus explained, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21–23). Our minds are where all sin begins.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spent a lot more time talking about the attitude of pride and arrogance and sinful thoughts than the actual deeds, because every sinful deed originates with a thought in the mind. So if we're going to squelch sin in our lives, we need to begin by asking the Lord to bring our minds and our thoughts into captivity to His Holy Spirit.



Dear Lord, guard my mind as well as my actions. Let the mind of Christ be in me, that my thoughts and life will always honor you.



For Further Study: Matthew 15:19, 20; Romans 12:2; Philippians 2:5



Are we still under the Old Testament laws regarding clean and unclean meats?

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).



Many people asking this question quote Romans 6:14 or Colossians 2, saying, “It seems we can eat anything we want to eat now.” It’s a fair question, but we need to be careful to distinguish what the Bible is really teaching in these passages. If we aren’t careful, we can jump to conclusions and connect two points that aren’t actually related—and end up distorting God’s will.

First, let me clarify that the reference in Colossians 2 speaks of the ceremonial law of types and shadows that pointed forward to the death of Jesus; this law has no further meaning beyond the cross. Verse 14 states, “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The sanctuary rituals associated with Christ’s sacrifice were fulfilled at Calvary. They are no longer necessary.

However, health laws actually preceded the time of Moses and the sanctuary system; they can be found going all the way back to Noah and the flood. During this time, God clearly identified a difference between clean and unclean animals. “You shall take with you [into the ark] seven each of every clean animal [and] . . . two each of animals that are unclean” (Genesis 7:2). They were to take more clean animals so they could eat them, as all the vegetation was destroyed following the flood; the unclean animals were not at risk to be consumed by Noah’s family.

Finally, Paul’s warning in Romans 6:14 is given in the context of those who attempt to gain salvation by keeping the law. Christians realize they are only saved by the merits of Christ. Attempting to gain heaven through one’s efforts is a sure way to miss this gift. Yet when Jesus is received into the heart, we should desire to keep the commandments in order to show our love to Him (John 14:15).



Today, Lord, write your laws in my heart. I open myself to receive you into my life. Thank you for your death on Calvary that sets me free from sin.



For Further Study: Leviticus 11:1–12; Isaiah 65:2–5; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 3 John 1:2

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Which day is the Sabbath, and does it still matter today?



*“But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God.
... For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,
the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day”
(Exodus 20:10, 11).*

The Bible is very clear that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. Many spiritual people worship Jesus on the first day of the week (Sunday), believing that the Sabbath was meant for the Jews only. But is this true? Genesis 2:1, 2, shows us that God established the Sabbath as a memorial of creation. No Jews existed at the beginning of the world! God chose a day to remind not only the Jews, but all of humanity, that He is both our sustainer and our Creator.

How do we know that the seventh day is what we call “Saturday”? First of all, Jews today still worship on Saturday. For a whole nation to forget which day is the Sabbath would be hard to believe! Second, astronomers who have studied changes in the calendar affirm that while many changes to the calendar have been made, they in no way affected the weekly cycle.

Third, the Bible tells us that even in His death, Jesus rested on the Sabbath. He was crucified on a Friday, the preparation day; He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath; and He rose the first day of the week. Fourth, dictionaries define “Sunday” as the first day of the week and “Saturday” as the seventh day. Indeed, if one looks at a calendar, the weeks begin with Sunday and end with Saturday. Fifth, in 145 languages of the world, the word for the seventh day of the week means “Sabbath day”!

God knew we needed a special day on which to nurture our relationship with Him. The devil wants us to forget about that time of rest so that our relationship with God will be destroyed. However, God still calls us to “Remember the Sabbath day” (Exodus 20:8) and honor Him as Creator by setting it apart for Him each week.



*Dear Jesus, I will take time every Sabbath to
remember you as my Creator and Redeemer.*



For Further Study: Luke 23:50–56; 24:1–3; Mark 16:9; Ezekiel 20:12, 20

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Must a person first overcome every bad habit before being baptized?

“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8).



I believe that certain tangible life changes should be evident before baptism. This is why John the Baptist stated, “Bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Since baptism reflects new birth, new life, and liberation from a life of sin, being baptized while still enslaved to sinful habits, such as drinking, would be a paradox.

Baptism is similar to marriage. For a man to marry a woman while still dating another would be a lie. Similarly, a person shouldn’t enter into a union with Christ through baptism while willingly still “dating the devil” in certain areas of life.

When people are baptized, they are publicly renouncing their old life of sin. Remember that baptism symbolizes death to the old way of life. When a person comes up out of the water, it is a symbol of resurrection and new life in Christ. The Bible says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

I am not suggesting that an individual needs to know everything or should be perfect before baptism. There isn’t anyone who meets those criteria. However, no one should enter into this special relationship unrepentant. To repent means to turn away from doing wrong and determine to do what is right with God’s help. The Word of God puts it this way: “Knowing this, 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” (Romans 6:6). Evidence of Christ’s victory will be apparent in a life that is consecrated to the Lord.

Of course, baptism does not bring perfection, and new believers will certainly feel a need for repentance after baptism. Thankfully, we have the promise that “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). As we go to Him daily, asking for forgiveness and the power to do His will, we will grow to be more like our Savior.



*Lord, give me genuine repentance
and new life in you today!*



For Further Study: Ephesians 4:21–24; Colossians 3:9, 10

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does Ezekiel teach that we should baptize by sprinkling?



“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:25, 26).

There is a popular belief that these verses prefigure the introduction of sprinkling for baptism. But do references to sprinkling in the Old Testament have a connection with the ordinance of baptism in the New Testament? A few facts reveal that it has no connection:

1. Moses was instructed to set the Levites apart for the priesthood. God said, “Sprinkle water of purification on them” (Numbers 8:7). This ceremony was a cleansing from impurity that included shaving off all their hair—something we don’t require in baptism.
2. Certain unclean people—such as those who touched a dead body (Numbers 19:16–18)—were isolated until they had been sprinkled with water of purification (Numbers 19:13). Ashes of a heifer were also used in connection with the sprinkled water (Numbers 19:17–19). We don’t isolate people in preparation for baptism.
3. In Ezekiel 36:25, 26, God does the sprinkling, and not a man to another man. He compares His people to the defiled or unclean of Israel and uses a term of cleansing they could understand. Baptism focused on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Sprinkling does not depict this in any way.
4. The ceremony of sprinkling was done away with under the new covenant, along with ashes of a heifer, etc. “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place. . . . 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 . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:12–14).
5. Perhaps the most important example to follow is that of Christ, who was fully immersed when baptized (Mark 1:9, 10).



*Lord, give me a new heart and put
a new spirit within me today.*



For Further Study: Romans 6:4–6; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:38

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



How is it that Jesus can bring us peace, but the Bible also says He came to bring a sword?

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).



In Matthew 10:34, when Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth,” He really means: “I did not come to bring political peace.” The Word of God brings division. Hebrews 4:12 says, “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” In Revelation, Christ is portrayed as coming with a sword protruding from His mouth—a symbol of the Word of God. The Word of God can be divisive because people take different positions on it.

Through history, Christians who lived godly lives have been persecuted. Soft Christians, those who claim His name but don’t live according to His Word, have often been the persecutors. The Crusades, the Inquisition, and many similar events through history were started and carried out by “Christians” who were not really converted, giving the genuine Christians a bad reputation. That, in turn, leads to further persecution of real Christians who model the teachings of Christ. And so, in that sense, Christianity does not bring peace politically.

However, the salvation that Christ offers individually brings internal peace to those who receive His Word. The Bible says, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3). And Jesus told His disciples, “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” (John 16:33). Putting our faith in Him brings us peace in spite of our surroundings.

Though trouble is a major attribute of our world, peace is a major attribute of our God. Soon the Prince of Peace will prevail on our planet and establish His kingdom. The Scripture says, “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). We can be assured that the New Earth will be a place of everlasting peace!



*Dear Lord, help me to trust in you so you
can fill me with your peace today.*





Are some types of work permissible on Sabbath, such as nursing?



“What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11, 12).

The Bible records that Jesus, by His example, showed that it is righteous to relieve suffering on the Sabbath.

In one instance, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on Sabbath and there was a crippled woman present. She had a “spirit of infirmity” and had been bent over and unable to straighten herself for 18 years. Jesus called to her and told her she was loosed from her infirmity. Then “He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God” (Luke 13:13). The Bible records several more instances in which people were healed by Jesus on the Sabbath. Just before healing a man with a withered hand, Jesus stated, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12).

By relieving the afflicted, we bring honor to His day. However, we are not to do unnecessary work or anything that can be done another day. Because of the nature of nursing duties, some are tempted to feel justified in doing things on the Sabbath that aren’t necessary. This can become habitual, until the sense of Sabbath sacredness is lost and God’s commandments are broken.

Some people in the medical field perform services on the Sabbath so they will be free other days of the week to do their own thing. That, I believe, is consciously breaking God’s commandment. Yet there are times when we must take our turn, and emergencies can arise when we must do our healing duties on the Sabbath. Some conscientious Christians even put the money they make on those days into God’s treasury, and I believe God honors and blesses these.

Whatever your situation, God will guide you if you put your trust in Him (Proverbs 3:5, 6).



Dear Jesus, help me to be aware of my motives in regard to keeping your Sabbath holy. Guide me to right decisions that honor your name.



For Further Study: Exodus 20:10; Luke 14:1–6; John 9:13–15



If Jesus came to “fulfill” the law, doesn’t that mean it is now abolished?

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).



It is evident from this passage that Christ was responding to those critics accusing Him of doing away with the law. He said, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the prophets*” (my emphasis). Instead of abolishing it, He was actually doing the opposite.

The word “fulfill” means just what it says, “to fill” or “to make full.” The same word is used in Matthew 3:15, where Jesus speaks concerning His baptism: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

There is nothing in this passage that suggests Jesus brought an end to or abolished God’s law. The “Law or the Prophets” included not just the Ten Commandments, but all the Old Testament writings. Christ fulfilled those Scriptures, just as He fulfilled all righteousness at His baptism, by His obedience to them. The apostle Paul used the same word in Colossians 1:25: “I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.” This does not mean to bring the Word of God to an end, but to fully carry it out in obedience.

Romans 8:4 uses the same word, stating “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Even those who think the law was abolished will admit that the righteousness in people who walk after the Spirit does not come about by abolishing the law.

Finally, Paul gives a classic example of the word “fulfill” in Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Not one Christian would interpret this to say, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so *abolish* the law of Christ!” The same is true with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:17. In fact, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount raises God’s law to even greater heights.



*Dear Jesus, may I fulfill your law through
inviting your Holy Spirit to live in my heart.*



For Further Study: Romans 13:8–10; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26, 27

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does Amos suggest that someday the Sabbath will come to an end?



“When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit” (Amos 8:5).

Strange as it might seem, this text has been quoted to “prove” that the Sabbath was to come to an end. But the context makes clear that Amos was condemning hypocritical Israelites who wished for the Sabbath hours to quickly end so they could return to their dishonest business dealings. It was a classic example of apostates resenting the time claimed by God for worship; they longed for the sun to set that they might be released from the “yoke” of a Sabbath they did not spiritually respect.

The “new moon” here refers to the first day of the month, when business was suspended and sacrifices were offered (1 Samuel 20:5, 24; Numbers 28:11; 2 Kings 4:23). These rebellious Israelites were always glad to see that day end because they had no pleasure for the worship prescribed.

Some have made it seem that it is God who is asking the question, “When will the New Moon be past . . . and the Sabbath?” It is not God; rather, it is the corrupt cheaters who inquire. Those who make this false application claim that God answers His own question in verse 9, where He tells when the Sabbath will come to an end. They apply verse 9 to the darkness that occurred during the crucifixion of Jesus and mistakenly claim that the Ten Commandments were finished at that time.

Actually, verse 9 has reference to the signs of a final judgment that will come on the earth, when the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give her light. Isaiah spoke of the same event (Isaiah 13:10), as did Jesus (Matthew 24:29) and John the Revelator (Revelation 6:12). It is nowhere connected to the death of Christ or the abolishing of the law of God.



Dear Lord, may I long to enjoy the Sabbath and delight in it as a special time to commune with you.



For Further Study: Isaiah 58:13; Mark 2:27; Matthew 12:11–13



Does the apostle Paul speak against people who say some foods are unclean?

“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Romans 14:14).



It’s best to look at Romans 14:14 in its full context. Paul was writing about a judgmental spirit among the apostolic believers. Verses 4, 10, and 13 speak against the sin of critically judging others. It caused a division in the early church. Gentile and Jewish Christians were battling each other.

The previous verse strikes at the heart of the issue: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (verse 13). The problem was that the Gentile Christians criticized the Jewish Christians for eating food sacrificed to idols. And the Jewish Christians judged the Gentile members for not regarding certain ceremonial days in Judaism.

Some Gentile converts were so fearful of eating meat offered to idols that they ate only vegetables. Paul speaks of them in verses 1 and 2. The Jewish Christians thought that was ridiculous and apparently made divisive attacks against their fellow Christians. It was so serious that Paul addressed the problem again in 1 Corinthians 8:8–12. Here Paul counseled his Jewish friends to not eat food offered to idols in the presence of those who thought it was wrong to do so. Even though they knew an idol was nothing, Paul still said to them, “Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:11, 12).

So the answer to today’s question is no; Paul is not directly speaking about unclean foods as defined in Leviticus 11. In fact, the issue is not really clean or unclean foods. The focus of his statements is on critical attitudes over non-moral issues that were dividing the church. He was, in essence, saying, “Let’s stop criticizing and wounding each other and get on with sharing the gospel!”



Lord, give me wisdom to discern issues that are important and issues that I should ignore.



For Further Study: Mark 7:2–5; Romans 14:19–23; 15:1–6

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does the apostle Paul teach that all Jews will be saved in God's kingdom?



“And so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

Some take this verse to mean that God will ultimately save all Jews. If this were true, it would contradict every principle of God's dealings with humans throughout history. God is not a racialist. In Jesus' eyes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28).

The context of this chapter makes it clear that Paul was *not* talking about people who were Israelites by physical birth. So who is the Israel to be saved? Paul had just finished spelling it out in verses 16–25. He described how the Gentiles would be grafted into the olive tree representing the Jewish people. As the Gentiles (represented by the wild olive tree) were grafted in, they began to partake of “the root and fatness” of the Israelites (v. 17). The “natural branches,” or Jews (v. 21), were cut off because of unbelief, and the believing Gentiles were accepted as spiritual Israel.

In Galatians 3:29, Paul says, “If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The picture grows clearer still as we read Romans 9:6–8. “It is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”

God's promise does not fail. All Israel will be saved; that is, those who by faith accept His promise. The true Israelite is one who believes in Christ. This person is accepted into God's family, not because they were physically born into Israel, but have been born again into Jesus. It is the new birth that places Jew and Gentile alike into the spiritual family of God; they will all be saved.



Dear Father, I choose by faith to believe in your promises and receive Christ into my life. Thank you for accepting me into your heavenly family.



For Further Study: Genesis 25:19–23; Romans 2:28, 29; Galatians 6:15, 16



If Christians pass from “death into life,” does this mean our souls go on living even though our bodies die?

“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” (John 5:24).



Not at all. You see, the Christian receives everlasting life as a gift when he or she accepts Jesus. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28). You pass from certain death to certain eternal life when you accept Christ.

We can more clearly understand what it means to avoid the condemnation of the “judgment” in this text by remembering that the Bible speaks of a “first” death and a “second” death. The first death can happen to anyone before the coming of Jesus. The second death is eternal, one from which there is no resurrection or possibility of life.

When we accept Christ we can still experience the first death, but we are given the assurance that we will not suffer the second death. John wrote, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power” (Revelation 20:6). It is the lake of fire that destroys all sin and is spoken of as the “second death” (v. 14).

Note what the Bible says of the apostle Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). Paul had the assurance of eternity even though he suffered the “first” death as a martyr.

We know that “it is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27), yet we can be assured on this earth that for the Christian, death is only a temporary interruption. This is why the Bible calls it a sleep (Matthew 9:24; John 11:11–14; Ephesians 5:14).



Dear Jesus, thank you for the assurance of eternal life that is mine by faith.



For Further Study: 1 John 4:17; John 3:36; Romans 8:31–39

Scan for more on this topic. ►



When was the Bible first published?



“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

The Bible was first mass printed in the mid-15th century, when Johann Gutenberg invented a new form of movable type that eventually led to the mass production of books. The Gutenberg Bible was published in Mainz, Germany, around AD 1454, and it was the first major book printed in the West. About 180 copies were made, and significant parts of 48 copies still remain.

However, the Bible was preserved and duplicated for many centuries before Gutenberg published it. The books of the Old Testament existed before Jesus was born, and both He and His disciples called them “the law and the prophets” (Luke 16:16).

The Jews guarded the Old Testament Scriptures so carefully that if a scribe made a single mistake while making a copy, he had to destroy the entire manuscript! It was a life’s work to ensure that every letter was just right, and curses were pronounced on any scribe who dared alter God’s Word in any way. This careful work paid off. The text of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which existed before the time of Christ, is almost exactly like the versions of the Old Testament we have today.

After Jesus died, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John penned their Gospels and Paul wrote his letters. Many years later, godly men began to assemble all of the writings from after the time of Christ, which they referred to as the New Testament. By AD 300, all of these books had been compiled to form the Bible that we still use today. The original language of the Old Testament is Hebrew and some Aramaic, whereas the New Testament was written in Greek.

The Greek word for Bible (*biblia*) means “books,” which accurately describes the collection of 66 sacred texts. God moved on the hearts of people, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to write down in human language truths impressed upon them for the purpose of spreading God’s message of salvation to others. Today, the Bible is the bestselling book of all time. About 100 million copies are printed each year. It is a book that has truly changed our world.



*Dear Lord, may your word abide
in my heart forever.*



For Further Study: Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16; Colossians 3:16

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Isn't salvation by keeping the law the way of Moses, while grace came through Jesus?

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).



The contrast presented in this verse was not meant to put down the law. After all, it was Christ who gave the law to Moses and who said that He came to "fulfill the law" (Matthew 5:17). Through the personal appearance of Jesus on the earth, through His life, death, and resurrection, the fullness of grace and truth was poured out onto our world.

The apostle John certainly does not mean that grace and truth didn't exist before Christ came, but that the "fullness" of grace was revealed in Jesus. All of the laws and teachings in the Old Testament pointed forward to Christ. John uses superlative expressions like these to describe the coming of Jesus into the world: "glory," "full of grace and truth" (verse 14), "His fullness," "grace for grace" (v. 16). It was like twilight giving way to noonday brightness!

But note that grace has been in the world from the beginning. Paul speaks of "grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9). Jeremiah spoke of "grace in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 31:2). Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8), and so did many other Old Testament characters.

The law served to lead men to salvation by faith in the Messiah. Notice Christ's words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25–27).

But the *fullness* of grace appeared in the person of Jesus. The law revealed the will of God, but the grace and truth of Jesus gives the power to keep it. "Where sin abounded [exposed by the law], grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20).



Dear Jesus, thank you for giving the law, which points me to you, my source of strength.



For Further Study: John 5:39, 45–47; Mark 7:9–13; Hebrews 8:6

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What does the apostle Paul mean when he says he would rather be “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord”?



“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6–8).

In verses 1–8, Paul is simply comparing our present mortal state with our future immortal life in heaven. He is showing us the difference between our earthly bodies that will someday perish and the new, perfect bodies that will be ours in heaven. Notice the expressions he uses for the two conditions:

earthly house	building from God
this tent	house not made with hands
mortality	our house which is from heaven
in the body	absent from the body
absent from the Lord	present with the Lord

The idea of being “absent from the body” does not teach that some immaterial part of us instantly floats up into heaven at the moment of death. It means to be absent from the infirmities of our earthly bodies, such as disease, sickness, and death. To be present with the Lord means to have our glorious immortal bodies that we’ll receive when Jesus comes.

Because we have no consciousness of time in death, it is true that for the believer, following the moment of death, their next conscious thought is inhabiting his or her glorified body. But that does not happen until the return of Christ and the resurrection.

Indeed, Paul is very clear precisely when the change from mortality will take place. In 1 Corinthians 15:52, 53, he writes, “For the trumpet will sound . . . and this mortal must put on immortality.” That will happen when Jesus comes.



Dear Lord, I long to set aside this mortal body and receive an immortal body when you come to this earth to receive your children.



For Further Study: 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Job 19:25, 26; Revelation 22:12
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Are there dangers in some of the new versions of the Bible?

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).



First, we need to understand that unless you are looking at the original Hebrew and Greek texts, all Bibles are translations. The question we need to ask is about the quality of a translation and the text sources used. Some translations are really "paraphrases," which means they don't follow the source text closely, but rather loosely and subjectively give the meaning of phrases. Examples of this are the Living Bible or The Message. It is misleading, for example, when the Living Bible calls the mark of the beast a tattoo.

The careful Bible student will recognize that there are some biases in some of the new English translations. For instance, Hebrews 9:12 in some Bibles speaks of the holy place, but in others it speaks of the most holy place. This variation is shaped by different theological viewpoints. That's why it is good to look at several translations that more closely follow the source text word by word, such as the King James, the New King James, and the New American Standard versions.

Sometimes the creation of these new translations is driven by money. Let me explain. The King James Bible is public domain. So in order for publishers to make money selling a Bible, they're required to say something different than existing versions in order to copyright, market, and own it. For instance, you can be sued for copying and quoting the New International Version without permission, because the publishers own that version. They have a monetary motivation to come up with something different, but how many ways can you say the same thing in English?

I personally believe the Lord can work through any version. People have come to Christ in many parts of the world reading many different translations. But if you are doing a deep study on a passage, compare several versions with each other. In church, I like my members to read Scripture out loud from the same translation; otherwise, we start sounding like a barnyard full of confusion! My favorite translations are the King James and the New King James.



*Dear Lord, thank you for preserving
your Word through the centuries.*





What are the two horns of Revelation 13:11?



*“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon”
(Revelation 13:11).*

That’s a deep question, and my answer will assume you have some familiarity with Revelation’s symbols. The first beast arose out of the sea (Revelation 13:1). The four beasts—representing nations—of Daniel 7 also arose from the sea (verse 3). Since “sea” represents peoples and nations (see Revelation 13:1; 17:1, 2, 8), “earth” could reasonably be assumed to represent a sparsely settled region. The nation thus represented by the beast of Revelation 13:11 would, therefore, develop into greatness in a region of few inhabitants.

Commentators have seen in this second beast a symbol of the United States of America. This power accurately fulfills the specifications of the prophecy. The United States declared independence in 1776, established its constitution in 1787, and was fully recognized as a world power by the time the “first beast” was going into captivity in 1798. The United States grew rapidly in prominence and power. The nation arose not in the Old World, with its teeming populations, but in the New World, with its relatively few inhabitants.

The two horns could be taken to represent the two notable features of the American system of government, civil and religious liberty, both of which are guaranteed in its constitution. Since the horns had no crowns, republicanism is represented instead of a monarchy. So the new nation’s civil liberty found expression in a republican form of government, while its religious liberty found expression largely in Protestantism.

The lamb-like horns symbolize a young, innocent, and peaceful nation. The United States established certain freedoms, including the freedom of religion. People could worship as they wished without government interference or control. The government is supposed to uphold that right. But eventually the beast begins to speak “like a dragon.” In the end times, the United States, spurning the ideals of its own constitution, will play a pivotal role in forcing people to worship against conscience or pay consequences.



Dear Lord, thank you that we now enjoy the wonderful gift of freedom to worship you. Help us to always be true to you, regardless of the consequences.



For Further Study: Daniel 7:24; Revelation 13:11–17; 17:15

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does the apostle Paul mean when he desires to “depart and be with Christ”?

*“I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”
(Philippians 1:23).*



Paul here is torn between living and laying down his life. He isn’t saying that he will go to be with Christ as soon as he dies. He uses the word “depart” in reference to his death. The Bible explains that Paul did not believe his “departure” would mean immediate entrance into heaven.

Notice this statement from Paul: “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . will give to me *on that Day*, and not to me only but also to all who have loved *His appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:6–8, my emphasis).

Paul didn’t expect to get his eternal crown at his departure in death. “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven . . . and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Paul’s desire to depart and be with Christ involved the resurrection that would take place at the end of the world. Since the unconscious sleep of death will feel like only a moment, Paul speaks of death and the coming of Christ as almost simultaneous. He doesn’t refer to the lapse of time in between these events.

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus referring to two events that were separated by 1,000 years, yet it sounds like they occur one right after the other. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28, 29).

When we lie down in the sleep of death, we are completely unconscious. It will seem but a moment to awake from death and see Jesus coming!



Lord, I’m so grateful to have peace about my future when I put my life in your hands.





Where are we in the timeline of the prophecies of Revelation?



“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

I believe we are living in the time described in Revelation 13 and 14. These chapters deal with the two great beasts. In chapter 13 the first beast—the one that rises from the sea and has seven heads and ten horns—was wounded, but its “deadly wound was healed.” This is a segment of time that has already passed. Then the second beast—which has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon (Revelation 13:11)—comes on the scene and is ready to make an image to the first beast that was healed. It tries to force everyone on Earth to worship the first beast.

According to Daniel 7, these beasts are nations. I believe the second beast is the United States, which accurately fits the description and historical setting. It looks like a lamb; it starts out as a nation founded on Christian principles, but it begins to speak like a dragon.

In prophecy, a lamb is a symbol of Christ and a dragon is a symbol of Satan. We are going to see America bringing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches to apostatize—to abandon their distinctive beliefs and come together to form a one-world church that undermines God’s law. However, there will be a biblical element who will remain true to God and refuse to receive the mark of the beast, “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

I believe we are on the verge of religious laws that will hedge in God’s people and force a decision for or against God’s moral law. This conflict will spotlight the fourth commandment, the law that focuses on God as Creator. That’s why the first angel’s message warns us to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7). Those who choose to keep God’s law will triumph. Jesus assures that “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).



Dear Lord, thank you for being my ever-present strength and shield. Make me unswerving in my commitment to you and your law of love!



For Further Study: Daniel 7:17; Matthew 24:12–14; Revelation 13 and 14

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the vision in Acts 10 teach that all meats are clean to eat?

*“And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat’”
(Acts 10:13).*



Acts 10 gives a stirring account of how a Gentile named Cornelius prays for the truth. An angel appears to him and tells him to send men to Joppa to invite the apostle Peter to come teach him (verses 3–6). As the servants of Cornelius approach, Peter has a dream and sees a sheet let down from heaven. In it are all types of “four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him. ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean’” (vv. 12–14).

Some people suggest that Christ cleansed *all* food when He was here. If that were true, Peter knew nothing about it. He had spent three-and-a-half years with the Master and listened to His instructions, yet Peter gathered no indication that unclean animals could now be eaten.

The vision initially confuses Peter, but as the story unfolds, the true meaning becomes clear. Verse 17 says, “Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius . . . stood at the gate.” Verse 19 adds, “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold three men are seeking you.’” Even the command in the vision to “arise” is repeated. “Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them” (v. 20).

Apparently, on the way back to Cornelius’ house, the Lord answered Peter’s ponderings and showed him the meaning of his vision. When he entered the house full of Gentiles, Peter said, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man *common or unclean*” (verse 28, emphasis mine).

The meaning was now perfectly clear. Peter’s vision had nothing to do with diet. It was a sign that the gospel was from now on to be preached to the Gentiles.



*Lord, may I always remember that you
consider all people as your children.*





Does Galatians 4:9–11 relate to Sabbath observance?



“After you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Galatians 4:9–11).

The apostle Paul also refers to this subject in Romans 14. The Jewish people celebrated two distinct kinds of holy days: the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments, which existed before sin took hold on this planet (see Genesis 2), and the sabbath days, which were ceremonial holy days established after the fall. The commandment Sabbath was spoken by God’s voice; the other ceremonial sabbaths were spoken by Moses. The Fourth Commandment was written by God’s finger in stone; the other holy days were written on parchment by Moses.

When Jesus came, He fulfilled and “nailed to the cross” the ceremonial laws (see Colossians 2:14). He did not, however, wipe away the Ten Commandments. Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). When we accept Christ, it doesn’t mean we have a license to lie, kill, and commit adultery. The Sabbath commandment is part of that same package.

When Paul wrote this passage, the Jewish converts to Christianity were telling the Galatians and the Romans to start observing all of the Jewish holy days—the Passover, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and so forth. Paul was saying, “You’re telling these people to observe the ceremonial shadows that pointed to Jesus. It doesn’t make sense to worship a shadow when the real thing has already come.” He wasn’t referring to the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments.

Some have tried to convince people that God was abolishing the one commandment that begins with the word “Remember.” It’s a weak argument. I’ve never heard a Sunday-keeping pastor stand up and say, “Don’t come to church on Sundays, or you’ll be observing days!”



*Heavenly Father, thank you for establishing the Sabbath as an eternal blessing for all people.
Write your law in my heart and mind today!*



For Further Study: Genesis 2:2, 3; Romans 14:5, 6; Hebrews 7:18



Is the antichrist a person or something else?

“I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words” (Daniel 7:8).



We sometimes get sidetracked by identifying *who* the Antichrist is and not focusing on *what* it represents—a corrupt religious power that attempts to take the place of Christ. Certainly there are passages that speak of him having “eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.” The apostle John wrote of this power as having “the number of a man” (Revelation 13:18). Just as Greece was represented by a goat in Daniel 8, with a horn that stood for Alexander the Great, so there will be a figure-leader who is directed by Satan.

But we can be misled when we try to lock on to a specific person, forgetting that it is their *position* that is against God. It is not so much that this religious leader is evil in and of himself. In fact, his rulership has changed hands many times over the centuries. Neither can we assume that all the members of this false religious church are bad, for God has said, “Come out of her, my people” (Revelation 18:4), which means there are still followers of the Lord within this organization.

The system is called “antichrist” because it has usurped Jesus’ authority and attempted to change His laws. It also teaches that priests can forgive sins, which only God can do (Luke 5:21); it has attempted to change the commandments by dropping the second one (on worshiping images) and splitting the tenth into two parts. But the Bible says God’s law cannot be changed (Matthew 5:18).

It was Satan’s original plan in heaven to take God’s authority. When he was cast out, he continued to discredit God and use other agencies to try to take over His position. In the final days of history, Satan will use this religious power to unite world governments in a final attempt to control the world and destroy God’s people.



*Lord, I commit to always follow the Lamb of God
who alone takes away the sin of the world.*



For Further Study: Revelation 13:3; Matthew 24:23, 24; Isaiah 8:20

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does the apostle Paul teach that the Ten Commandments did not exist until Sinai?



"For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Romans 5:13).

Some teach that the phrase "until the law" here means that the law did not exist between Adam and the time of Moses. But the balance of the text, coupled with Romans 4:15, proves just the opposite: "Because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression." If there was no law when Cain killed his brother, it wouldn't have been a sin. Yet Genesis 4:7 speaks of sin lying at the door.

It's interesting to see references to God's laws before the Ten Commandments were given on Mt. Sinai. Note how God rebuked His people: "The LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?'" (Exodus 16:28). Evidently, there was a basic understanding of God's law already. People were punished for breaking any one of the commandments before Sinai, indicating that the law existed and sin was imputed. God also honored Abraham, who kept His commandments, statutes, and laws (Genesis 26:5).

The law did not exist in *written* form prior to Sinai. I believe, with the incredible minds God gave people before the Flood, there was no need to write down the law. As the Lord walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, He taught them His law. When sin came and they were removed from Eden, the Lord further explained the sacrificial system. Our first parents simply passed along these truths verbally.

The Ten Commandments before Sinai:

First	Genesis 35:2–4	Sixth	Genesis 4:8–15
Second	Genesis 31:19–34	Seventh	Genesis 39:7–9
Third	Genesis 12:3	Eighth	Genesis 44:8–16
Fourth	Exodus 16:–26	Ninth	Genesis 27:12
Fifth	Genesis 9:20–25	Tenth	Genesis 25:29–34; 27:1–45

Israel had lost sight of the principles of God's law while in Egyptian bondage. So God wrote that law with His own finger to bring it back to mind.



*Dear Lord, thank you for giving us your law,
a picture of your righteous character.*



For Further Study: Psalm 111:7, 8; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:17, 18



Does God speak to people through near-death experiences?

*“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”
(Isaiah 8:20).*



A number of people claim to have had so-called “near-death experiences” (NDEs), where they died (or almost died) and then came back to share experiences of seeing lights and sometimes meeting angels, Jesus, and even dead relatives. Others speak of “out-of-body” experiences. If you are not familiar with the Bible’s teaching on the state of the dead, NDEs can be a very deceptive tool of the devil.

The most important thing to remember is that you should never build your understanding of Scripture based on your senses. Always base it on the Word of God.

A doctor once explained to me what can happen during extreme heart trauma, when the brain is robbed of oxygen. It’s very dangerous when you don’t get enough oxygen—you can hallucinate and have visions. It’s a well-known biological occurrence. A person who claims to have risen out of their body or had a dream during near-death moments might have simply experienced a physiological phenomenon resulting from this lack of oxygen. What they experience might seem real, but it is merely a fantasy of their imagination.

I wouldn’t totally rule out the possibility of God speaking to a person through a vision. We have examples of this in the Bible. But I would warn you again that we should never build our theology on near-death experiences. If you ever think the Lord is speaking to you through such a phenomena or even a dream, compare it with the Word of God. Too often the messages people hear are not biblically sound.

Satan will use any means to lead people astray from the Bible. The closer we come to the coming of Christ, the more deceptive will be his practices. Notice Paul’s warning: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:13, 14). We can’t always count on our senses for finding truth.



*Lord, may I always search the
Scriptures to determine the truth.*



For Further Study: Ecclesiastes 9:5; Jeremiah 14:14

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Doesn't the apostle Paul teach that the righteous will come down with Christ at the second coming?



"So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

It might first appear that this verse teaches that when Jesus comes again, the righteous dead will come with Him—instead of waiting for Him to call them from their graves. We first need to ask: Who are the "saints" mentioned in this text? When we let the Bible explain itself, all of our questions are answered.

Jesus clearly described those who would come with Him the second time. He said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31). Earlier in Matthew, Jesus says, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

If Jesus said He would come with "all the holy angels" and Paul said "with all the saints," is there a contradiction? Not when you study the whole of Scripture. Angels are indeed sometimes called "saints" in the Bible. Note how Moses described the giving of God's law on Mt. Sinai: "The LORD came from Sinai; . . . He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand came a fiery law for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2).

When we compare this passage with a parallel description in King David's writings, we find the following: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place" (Psalm 68:17 KJV). Though the term "saints" certainly can refer to the redeemed children of God, we can know that in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, it must be speaking of angels, because of Christ's definitive statements combined with what we know about the state of the righteous dead at Christ's coming (see part 2 of this question).



Dear Jesus, thank you for the hope of the resurrection, when all the dead saints will be raised to life again!



For Further Study: Mark 8:38; Acts 1:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7



Doesn't the apostle Paul teach that the righteous will come down with Christ at the second coming?

"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus"
(1 Thessalonians 4:14).



Again, a surface reading of this verse seems to teach that the righteous dead "who sleep in Jesus" will come with Christ when He returns. But the next three verses make it clear that this could not possibly be the case. Why? Because the "dead in Christ" are raised from their graves when "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven" (verse 16). So it would be impossible for them to come with Christ when He comes to resurrect them.

The true meaning of this verse is revealed when we read 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . . But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, *afterward* those who are Christ's *at His coming*" (my emphasis). Paul stated that Jesus was raised first as a guarantee that the righteous dead would be raised "at His coming." Jesus said, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). His resurrection makes it possible for God to raise us as He did Christ.

This is what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep [those who are dead] in Jesus." The words "with Him" do not mean that the resurrected ones will be brought from heaven with Him at His coming, but that God will "bring" up those who are sleeping in their graves, just as He brought forth Jesus from the grave.

In Hebrews 13:20, we read that "God . . . brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead." The text in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says that God *will bring* those who "sleep in Jesus"—an obvious reference to the resurrection. Paul is simply stating that because God brought Jesus from the grave, we have a guarantee that He *will bring* sleeping saints forth in the same way at the time of His coming.



*Dear Lord, thank you for the hope of
the resurrection, when all your sleeping
saints will rise to new life!*





In prophecy, does the symbol “beast” mean “beastly” characteristics?



“After this I saw ... a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns” (Daniel 7:7).

Daniel has a strange vision of four beasts coming out of the sea. Like the book of Revelation, Daniel is an “apocalyptic” volume about the last days. These dreams are filled with symbolism. The Bible explains these pictures, often within the very context of the same book. For instance, Daniel 2 is a parallel vision to Daniel 7 and identifies the first kingdom as Babylon (Daniel 2:38, 39). Daniel 8 is also a parallel vision and identifies the second power as Medo-Persia (Daniel 8:20).

The most terrible beast of Daniel 7 is a fourth world kingdom represented by a frightening monster with ten horns and iron teeth. Once more, we find a parallel in Daniel 2, where the fourth kingdom was represented by iron and later divided into 10 nations represented by 10 toes. We know from history that the 10 horns represent 10 kingdoms into which modern-day Europe was divided.

If we define “beastly” as lacking intelligence, we would be fooled, for it has always been Satan’s ploy to deceive. In the end, the devil will not raise up some off-the-wall pagan system of religion to lead people astray. His greatest deception is to build a false religion within Christianity itself, a power that looks like the real thing. On the other hand, this false religious power has definitely exhibited brutal characteristics over the centuries in persecuting God’s faithful people.

Just before Christ comes, two powers will unite to carry out Satan’s final effort to annihilate the Lord’s children. They are described in Revelation 13 as the “beast of the sea” that influences the “beast of the earth” to “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Revelation 13:14, 15). This beast is powerful and deadly.



Dear Lord, I know that I am safe in your hands from any earthly powers. Nothing can separate me from your love.



For Further Study: Revelation 13:1–18; Daniel 7:1–8; 8:1–14



Wasn't the law nailed to the cross?

“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).



Indeed, a certain law was nailed to the cross. This was the ceremonial law of types and shadows that pointed forward to the death of Jesus and that has no further meaning beyond the cross. The apostle Paul said it is contrary to the Christian. The torn veil in the temple at the death of Christ (Matthew 27:51) indicated the end of that ordinance of animal sacrifices, and Ephesians 2:15 says that Jesus “abolished . . . the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”

This is why Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16, 17, that we are no longer judged by “food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths” because they are “a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” It is interesting to note that these ceremonial laws were handwritten by Moses on parchment and placed beside the ark, whereas the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on stone and placed inside the ark. Think about it: Wouldn't it be difficult to nail rock to the cross?

These yearly sabbaths (a small “s”) are not the weekly Sabbath (a capital “S”) of the Ten Commandments. They are shadowy sabbaths described in Leviticus 23:24–37. They fell on certain set days of the month—a different day of the week each year, yet they were called sabbaths. But note in verses 37 and 38 how they were distinguished from the weekly Sabbath: “These are the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day—*besides the Sabbaths of the LORD*” (emphasis added).

These ceremonial sabbaths were set apart from the weekly Sabbath in the moral law. Understanding this clears up the mystery of Colossians 2:16. The law of the yearly sabbaths was nailed to the cross, but the great Sabbath commandment was not affected.



*Dear Jesus, thank you for coming and fulfilling
all the shadows of the Old Testament.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 2:15, 16; Colossians 2:20

Scan for more on this topic. ►





Does the Bible teach that we should be baptized on behalf of our dead relatives?



“Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:29).

This interesting teaching by the apostle Paul might make it sound as if a person can be vicariously baptized on behalf of their dead relatives and friends and, thereby, secure salvation for the dead. Before looking more closely at the text, we should first be clear that the Bible teaches a person must *personally* believe in Jesus and confess his or her own sins in order for baptism to have any real meaning.

The apostle Peter told the crowd at Pentecost: “Repent, and let every one of *you* be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38, my emphasis). David tells us, “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him” (Psalm 49:7). “As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Our probation closes when we die; you cannot be saved by proxy.

So what could Paul possibly mean in this verse? Two explanations stand the test of Scripture. The first is the belief that Paul was merely referring to a pagan custom as an illustration to support the resurrection. In other words, he was saying, “Even the pagans, who get baptized on behalf of dead relatives, believe in the resurrection. How much more should we believe when we know Christ rose from the dead?”

Another view is that Paul is using the word “baptize” in a figurative sense. Notice Jesus’ words: “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matthew 20:22). Paul says, in his very next verse, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:30). So to paraphrase our text, Paul might be saying, “If there is no resurrection, why should God’s messengers keep facing death?”



Dear Jesus, I personally believe in you and accept your plan of salvation for me today.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 15:12–32; Luke 12:50; Ezekiel 18:20–24



What are the “wars and rumors of wars” spoken of by Christ?

*“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass”
(Matthew 24:6).*



One of the signs of Jesus’ second coming is that there would be major wars. There certainly have been wars and rumors of wars in the past few years. The news stories seem to grow each day. And in the previous century alone, hundreds of wars cost more lives than in all the other previous centuries’ wars combined! These are certainly signs of the nearness of Christ’s coming, but the Bible also talks about wars that are not between nations.

I once punched the word “war” into my Bible computer program while researching for a broadcast. I was amazed to find the word more than 200 times—not including the plural form! I believe the battles mentioned in Scripture are also an object lesson to teach us how to overcome our own internal wars. The Bible is loaded with this terminology. We’re all fighting the good fight of faith, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:12.

In 2 Timothy 2:3, he adds, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles themselves in the affairs of this life, that he might please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4, states, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty for pulling down strongholds.” Peter adds, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

There is the war going on between the spirit and the flesh, between the Lord and the devil. The battleground is our minds and hearts. The war of all wars is the struggle over a man’s soul between Satan and Jesus. There is a great controversy being played out, and they’re not fighting over geographic dirt. They are fighting over the allegiance of intelligent creatures in this world.



*Dear Jesus, in the great battle over my heart,
I choose to give all my loyalty to you.*



For Further Study: Ephesians 6:10–20; Psalm 91; 1 Peter 5:8

Scan for more on this topic. ▶



Is it possible to preach Jesus' end-time truth without including the three angels' messages?



"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John" (Revelation 1:1).

The book of Revelation is built on a promise: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Revelation 1:3). The messages within this sacred book were not intended to be locked away or ignored. They are to be spread throughout the world. This is reinforced once more at the end of the book: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:7).

Pastors who are faithful to the Word of God will not neglect preaching on the prophecies found in John's apocalypse. This includes the special messages of Revelation 14:6–13. Notice that the message of the first angel is called the "everlasting" gospel. It is not a temporary sermon for just a few people. It is to go to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (v. 6).

The message of the second angel states, "Babylon is fallen" (v. 8) and warns people to come out of Babylon (vv. 1, 2, 4). Unless you understand that Babylon is a false religious system, you cannot leave her. This is a message of preparation for the soon coming of Christ. The third angel's message warns against worshipping "the beast and his image" (14:9–11). It is a sobering warning that there will soon come a time when a false religious power will seek to force everyone to break God's fourth commandment.

These three angels' messages are summed up by identifying God's people: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (v. 12). In the face of the overwhelming deception and persecution that is soon to come, how could any genuine religious leader not want to warn people?



Father in heaven, thank you for sending this end-time message of warning to help your people prepare for your soon return.



For Further Study: Ezekiel 3:17–21; 2 Peter 1:12; Matthew 28:18–20

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible teach that women are never to speak in church?

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35).



Two principles are involved in the apostle Paul’s counsel to the Corinthian church. First, there was a violation of propriety and decency. In verse 33, Paul says, “God is not the author of confusion but of peace.” He cautions, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (v. 40).

In the early church, men and women sat in segregated groups on opposite sides of the room. Apparently, some women were creating considerable disorder by calling across the aisle to their husbands, asking for clarification on certain points in the sermon. Paul asked them to stop disrupting the sermon by waiting to ask their husbands at home about anything that wasn’t clear.

Eastern culture stipulated that a modest woman be veiled and remain in the background; there was danger that women in the Christian church might be linked with the shamelessly bold women whose conduct stigmatized the city of Corinth.

The second principle involves the traditional role of men in both home and church affairs. The man was primarily responsible for leading out in worship. In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul warned that women were not “to have authority over a man.” Therefore, they should assume no position in the church that would potentially create disorder.

Women have served very effectively in the work of the church. They have been called by God into prophetic office (Luke 2:36, 37; Judges 4:4) and were given recognition by Paul in public and private witnessing roles (1 Corinthians 11:5). And so, we need to discover and apply the basic principles of Paul’s counsel in our churches today. God has special gifts for all people. We should exercise them within perimeters that help build up the church and not create the confusion that we read about in the church at Corinth.



*Dear Lord, may my conduct always seek
to build up the body of Christ.*





Does the Bible teach that women are never to speak in church?



"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control" (1 Timothy 2:11–15).

I think it's important to first state that God desires women to serve in the church. There are plenty of examples of godly women who served the Lord in many different capacities. (See the previous entry.) But as with all of Paul's letters to the churches, he gives helpful guidelines to keep the church on track. Paul is seeking to give counsel to women in the church at Ephesus who were stepping too far.

It's also important to understand that the word for silence in the original Greek does not signify total silence, but rather "quietness" and "peacefulness." It is quite clear from Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women were encouraged to pray and prophesy along with others in the congregation.

In his epistles to Timothy, Paul teaches that women were to exercise a supportive role in the church as far as speaking was concerned. Because of a serious problem with false teachers (see 2 Timothy 3:6), Paul dealt with those who were falsely enlightened and needed to be reined in. For this reason he teaches that a woman should not "have authority over a man." Verse 11 says that they should be in "submission."

In summary, Paul gave counsel to Timothy on how to provide order in the church for the purpose of helping it to be a strong witness to the world. Whatever would distract from our witness or create confusion should be dealt with in a way that brings honor to God's kingdom.



Dear Lord, thank you for guidelines that help to protect and strengthen your church.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40; Ephesians 4:11–16; Romans 12:4–8



Does the Bible say anything about being involved in secret societies?

“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).



A secret society is a group that often meets in secret places closed to public viewing. Examples include elite organizations, like the Mason society, and even some religions. Throughout the Bible, Jesus says we should walk in the light. When people are doing things in a dark place, it can cast doubt. But Christians should be transparent and shouldn't take secret oaths. Jesus says to let our nays be nays and our yeas be yeas—we shouldn't be swearing by things shrouded in secret. Many policies and principles in secret societies contradict the openness of Christianity.

In John 15:15, Jesus says, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Jesus is not keeping secrets; He is being open with us. Honesty, transparency, openness—whatever you want to call it—should be a Christian characteristic.

Another point worth mentioning is that many times, secret societies require members to pledge their allegiance to someone or something other than God. But our full allegiance belongs only to God. He must have first place in our hearts. Jesus said even if we love our own families more than Him, we're not worthy of Him (see Matthew 10:37).

In addition, people who join secret societies are often sworn to obey rules that are in conflict with Scripture. Some have rituals steeped in paganism. They might even pretend to be religious, while members are led to believe they can earn their way to heaven through works, rather than through simple faith in Christ. This kind of teaching contradicts and undermines the gospel. So there are many problems with secret societies, and Christians should definitely steer away from them.



Heavenly Father, thank you that your Word is an open book, free to all who want to learn about the salvation you offer us through faith in your Son.





Is it permissible for Christians to wear wedding rings?



“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing” (1 Timothy 2:9).

Would it surprise you to know that 150 years ago, most Protestants Christians did not wear any jewelry at all, including wedding rings? This symbol reportedly goes back to ancient Babylon, and perhaps even before this time, when a woman was bought as a slave. If she wasn't a virgin, they would put a ring on her finger. Eventually, this practice made its way into Pagan Rome.

Obviously, multitudes of sincere Christians who wore wedding bands will be in heaven, but there is nothing in the Bible that supports the idea of wearing the symbol as a marker of marriage. You might hear all sorts of euphoric sermons on how it represents the “eternal circle of love,” but it's all concocted by men.

Once Christians compromise with human traditions and make concessions to wear jewelry, there is no real end to it. What I have found as a pastor is that once a little hole in the dam appears, the dam will eventually break. Today, professed Christians are piercing and hanging multiple minerals all over their bodies. I don't believe God wants us to do that; it's just another custom to get you to buy stuff you don't really need.

Because we wrestle with sin and temptation, now is not the time to glorify our exteriors. The supreme goal of the Christian is to attract attention to Christ, not to self. Decorating our mortal bodies with glittering gems usually springs from pride, which is diametrically opposed to the spirit and principles of Jesus. “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

The wearing of the wedding ring has become a widely accepted tradition. But if sincere seekers of God study this topic and are convicted to remove all jewelry from their body temples, God will give them the grace to follow Him above man's popular tradition. “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:9).



Lord, may my heart be adorned, not with outward apparel, but with a character after your likeness.



For Further Study: 1 Peter 3:2–5; Genesis 35:2–4; Isaiah 3:16–24; Exodus 33:3–6

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Will people who eat unclean animals—such as pork, shrimp, lobster, etc.—go to heaven?

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).



This question addresses people who eat the animals that God calls unclean and are unfit for human consumption. Is it a sin? Well, it depends on what the Lord has revealed to the person. The Bible shows that if we know that God forbids eating these things, we should avoid eating them.

For instance, in Daniel 1, the Babylonians offered the prophet Daniel a diet that included unclean foods. He said, “I cannot defile myself with a portion of the king’s food.” He would rather have died before he ate the Babylonian food because he knew better. It’s really a question of loyalty; what will you do when you learn the truth? For certain, there will most likely be an uncountable number of believers in the kingdom who probably ate things that the Bible calls forbidden, simply because they didn’t know any better. This is why Acts 17:30 says, “These times of ignorance God overlooked.” When we don’t have the knowledge, God shows us mercy.

Sin is defined as knowing good but not doing it; that’s one of the Bible definitions: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). When we know God’s will and don’t do what He asks, that’s a sin.

First Corinthians 3:16 asks us, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” This makes it perfectly clear that our body is God’s temple. It matters to the Lord how we treat that temple. So whether it’s keeping the Sabbath or honoring our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, God wants us to live up to the light He gives us. If you know the truth but don’t act on it, what does that tell God?



Dear Lord, make me willing to be obedient to your commands. Give me the strength to always do what I know is right and to live up to the light you give me.





Is all of the Bible inspired or only parts of it?



"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The testimony of the Bible's inspiration is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, which clearly states *all* Scripture is inspired of God. When we are tempted to take out a pair of scissors and cut out those passages that we don't like or think are not inspired, we place ourselves above Scripture. We put ourselves in a position to judge the Word of God, rather than letting the Bible be our judge.

Some believe there are "degrees of inspiration" in the Bible. They feel some stories are exaggerated, some histories are glorified, and some narratives are symbolic even though they might not be presented that way. Modern skeptics reject the story of Adam and Eve, question the worldwide flood, and doubt that a fish swallowed a man and then later spewed him out on a beach.

Yet Scripture itself provides no variation in its contents. What makes the Bible's content accurate? How is it that all of its historical narratives are true? The answer is divine inspiration. I accept all of Scripture as divinely inspired; even the parts that are hard for me to understand reveal God's plan to save people. I am continually awed that even within the shadows of Old Testament stories that seem useless, I suddenly find pictures of Jesus. Through faithful and persistent study, I have found hidden truths of gold.

It's no limitation on the part of the Bible that I don't see these inspired teachings; it's because of my own lack of faith. We need to be more like the blind man to whom Jesus asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). Like this man who could not see, we need to pray, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight," and then hear Jesus reply, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." Mark then writes, "And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road" (v.52).



Dear Jesus, open my eyes to see all the inspired truths of Scripture.



For Further Study: 2 Peter 1:21; Psalm 12:6, 7; John 16:13

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What did Jesus mean when He said that whoever believes in Him will *never* die?

"Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die"
(John 11:26).



This Bible verse cannot be speaking about the "first" death, which we all will experience if Christ hasn't returned, "as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Because Adam sinned, his death sentence has been passed on to every person born on this planet. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The context of Jesus' words in John 11 is the story of Lazarus' death. Martha approaches Christ, who says to her, "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23). She affirms her belief in the future resurrection. In verse 25, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." Christ's next words state, "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." Christ was clearly talking about the eternal death of the lost at the final judgment.

Some people take Jesus' words to mean that even if you die the first death, you don't really die but go straight to heaven or hell. That's not what this verse says. Jesus explained, "Though he may die, he *shall* live" (my emphasis). The resurrection does not happen instantly when a person dies. Martha makes this point when she says, "I know that he *will* rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*" (v. 24, my emphasis).

It is the second death from which Christ saves us. "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6). *All* who die will be resurrected (Acts 24:15). It is the final death that we will not experience as followers of God: "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:14). God will destroy death, but we are safe in His hands.



*Lord, I commit my life today into
your safekeeping hands.*





If the Bible is truly God's book, shouldn't everyone be able to understand it?



"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:13, 14).

Have you ever tried to watch a movie in 3-D *without* those funny-looking glasses? It looks blurry, right? (You might even get a headache doing it.) Though the industry is working to make these lenses unnecessary, most 3-D films are shown from two projectors perfectly lined up and displaying two images on the same screen. The polarization of those special glasses corrects the fuzzy picture and separates the images, making them clear.

Likewise, some people see only blurry images when they read the Bible. It just doesn't make sense to them. They wonder, "What is the point of that strange service in which animals are sacrificed in the Old Testament?" And the death of Jesus on the cross appears to be a waste of someone's life. I believe the Bible doesn't seem clear to some people because there's a missing element: Like special glasses, we need to put on the lenses of faith.

Bright people who can understand and explain virtually anything else are often quickly stopped in their tracks when they read the Bible. The reason is that spiritual things "are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The deep things of the Word will never be understood by a secular mind, no matter how brilliant. Unless one honestly seeks an experience with God, he cannot understand the things of God. The Holy Spirit, who explains the Bible, is not understood by the carnal mind. On the other hand, the humble, even uneducated Christian who studies the Bible receives amazing understanding from the Holy Spirit.

So put on faith when you read the Bible. Sincerely pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to discern truth. And be prepared to have your vision expanded!



Dear Lord, I come to the Word by faith and ask for the Holy Spirit to help me see truth.



For Further Study: John 16:13; 14:26; Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10



What was the apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh"?

"Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7).



Many Bible scholars believe that Paul had a problem with his vision. There are a number of Bible texts that support this theory:

1. When he was converted, Paul—then named Saul—went blind (Acts 9:8, 9). Then, in verse 18, it says that scales fell from his eyes and he could see again. But it doesn't say that he saw perfectly.
2. Paul often had other people write his letters for him even though he was very brilliant, spoke many languages, and was very well educated. He only signed these letters. One time he said, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" (Galatians 6:11). That didn't mean he'd written a long letter; it meant he wrote with big characters, probably because he couldn't see.
3. When he addressed the Sanhedrin in Acts 23, he denounced the high priest (v. 3). The people standing nearby replied, "Do you revile God's high priest?" (v. 4). Paul responded, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest" (v. 5). He wasn't able to see that the one he addressed was the high priest, and he immediately apologized for his error.
4. In one epistle, Paul spoke of the church's love for him by saying, "If possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:15). People must have known he had a problem with his eyes, so I believe the thorn in Paul's flesh was his poor vision.

His "thorn" was similar to when Jacob wrestled with an angel; Jacob had a limp for the rest of his life after that experience. When Paul was converted, he temporarily went blind, but he still had sight problems the rest of his life. It was a blessing in disguise.



Dear Lord, may the challenges in my life be seen as opportunities to be humble and trust in you more.





What does the apostle Paul mean when he writes about being “kept under a tutor”?



“Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23–25).

The key to this text is in its first four words: “But before faith came.” Paul is talking about his condition of condemnation before he exercised faith in Christ. Being “under the law” is defined in Romans 3:19: “We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

The law reveals to us our true condition before God—guilty and under the sentence of death. During those years of sin, Paul was “kept under the law,” held in the prison house of disobedience. He explained, “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23).

But even when Paul was outside of Christ, without faith, the law was operating on his conscience, magnifying his misery and condemnation and leading him step by step, like a schoolmaster, to the Savior. After being directed to Christ by the law, Paul says we are “justified by faith.” This is what the law could not do. It could not justify; it could only condemn. Christ freely forgives and delivers.

When we live by faith, we exercise trust in Christ to not only forgive us of our sins, but to put the law within our hearts. We don’t just move away from being “condemned” by the law, but also from attempts to justify ourselves apart from Christ (Romans 10:4). Many people try to keep the law in their own power to prove to God they are worth loving and saving. It’s a losing proposition. Even our best efforts without the power of the Holy Spirit amount to filthy rags.



*Dear Lord, I realize I cannot keep your law
in my own strength. Forgive me and send
your Spirit to help me do your will.*



For Further Study: Romans 7:13; Psalm 40:8; Acts 13:39



Is it safe to rely on something, such as Scripture, so far removed from our time and culture?

“The word of the LORD endures forever” (1 Peter 1:25).



Actually, the age of the Bible speaks in its favor. It is one of the proofs of its divine inspiration. The Bible stands as a rock that cannot be easily moved or destroyed. Nations and people have tried to burn, ban, and discredit the Bible. Some have determined to completely destroy the Scriptures. These people are long gone, but the Word of God continues to be the bestselling book of all time.

Thousands have died for having the Scriptures. They have given their lives to retain the Word of God because they counted its treasures more valuable than life itself. They have found its messages true and relevant to their lives. Though written over a period of about 1,500 years, the 40 different authors, all from different walks of life, were inspired by the Holy Spirit to share God’s messages with others.

In the hectic pace of the world today, filled with texting and satellites, we might wonder if the Bible is still relevant. But I’ve seen many who find themselves looking to God’s Word when life goes sour. Perhaps they’ve had an accident or health challenge and are lying flat on their backs in a hospital bed, listening to their heart monitor beeping. With hours of time to reflect, they begin wondering, “Is there a God? What is the purpose of life?”

Often, in times of difficulty, people set aside the issues that seem most important and begin to reflect more deeply on matters that press on their hearts. It is in these moments that many turn to the Scriptures and discover the Word is very applicable to their questions about the future. They find meaning in texts such as: “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Read the Bible. Study its stories. Claim the promises in God’s Word and you will find them as up-to-date as the latest technology in your pocket.



Dear Jesus, I open my heart to receive your enduring messages for my life today.



For Further Study: Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Psalm 119:105

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Which law is being addressed in Galatians 3:19?



“What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19).

The answer appears as we discover the single subject of this chapter. The apostle Paul is contrasting condemnation and justification, and the chief point of his argument is that “no one is justified by the law in the sight of God” (verse 11). The argument is not whether the law operates or not, but whether it operates as a *justifier* of guilty sinners.

Paul spells out in many other texts that the law is necessary as a *revealer* of sin. “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law” (Romans 7:7). The law can condemn, but it cannot justify.

In the verse that precedes Galatians 3:19, Paul shows how our inheritance is not by the law but, rather, by a promise from God. Verse 21 then shows once more how the law does not bring life. “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (Galatians 3:21).

These verses make it clear that Paul was not talking so much about any particular law—whether the ceremonial laws of Moses or the moral law—but rather, he was addressing the belief among some that a law could justify a person. That was not the purpose of any of God’s laws. All they could do was condemn fallen people and point them to their need of a Savior, the Seed who came. Christ delivered us from the condemnation of the law. Even so, the law does not cease to exist. As soon as we step off God’s pathway, the law is there to point us back to Jesus.



*Dear Jesus, help me to appreciate your law
as a means to point me back to you.*



For Further Study: John 15:22; Galatians 4:4, 5; Romans 7:13



How can anyone believe the Bible is inspired when it's full of errors?

"The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm 12:6).



First, the overwhelming majority of so-called errors in the Bible have been demonstrated to be a lack of understanding on the part of those who make this complaint. They are not errors at all, but simply truth misunderstood. The Bible will always tell you the truth, will never mislead you, and is reliable and authoritative, not only in spiritual matters but also in history and science.

Archaeologists have uncovered more than 25,000 sites that confirm the reliable history found in the Bible. There are over 2,000 fulfilled biblical prophecies, some with great detail, such as what we read in Isaiah 53 about the Messiah. And New Testament eyewitnesses to events are numerous. Most writers either personally saw Jesus or interviewed an eyewitness close to Him.

Some ask, "Were not errors made in copying manuscripts down through the centuries?" It's true that minor copy errors were made in some manuscripts. Almost all of them are easily explained as simple mistakes in copying. But what is most impressive about this is that only one-fifth of one percent are worth considering, and even these do not affect the clear doctrines of the Bible. It's interesting that compared to the best copied work in antiquity, the *Iliad*, which is also considered a "sacred" work by some, the New Testament is 25 times more accurate. Even more amazing is that while the *Iliad* has 643 ancient copies available, the New Testament has more than 24,000!

Satan is always digging up some supposed flaw in Scripture, which is not surprising. He found fault even with God and heaven. Copyists might have miscopied in some cases, but no such supposed happening or any other alleged error affects the truth of God's Word. Doctrine is built not upon one Bible passage, but upon the total of God's comments on any subject. There will always be room for doubt to those who prefer to doubt. Yet the harder people work to undermine the Bible, the brighter its light shines.



O Lord, you have preserved your Word through many generations. I can trust the Bible.



For Further Study: John 7:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 119:160

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What kind of body does Jesus have right now—physical or spirit?



“Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side” (John 20:19, 20).

There is more than one description of Jesus after the resurrection showing that He was not just a spirit floating around; He had a body of flesh and bone. Notice this post-resurrection appearance to the disciples:

“Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence” (Luke 24:36–43).

There are lots of details that show Christ had a body—mind you, a resurrected body that was incorruptible and not tainted with sin. The disciple Mary touched this real body after the resurrection (John 20:17). Jesus invited Thomas to physically touch His hands, feet, and side (John 20:27). Christ met the disciples for breakfast by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1–14).

Finally, Christ walked with His disciples out to Bethany, where He lifted up His hands and blessed them before ascending into heaven (Luke 24:50). Notice what the two angels say to the disciples: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Just as they saw Jesus with a physical body then, we will likewise see Him when He comes back the second time.



Dear Jesus, I look forward to seeing you, touching you, and being with you when you come again.



For Further Study: 1 John 1:1; Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55



Does the Bible portray the devil as a red, beast-like creature with horns?

*“Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light”
(2 Corinthians 11:14).*



We’ve all seen those pictures of Satan dressed in red carrying a three-pronged spear used to torment sinners in hell. But you’ll never find this depiction in the Bible. Before his fall, Satan’s name was Lucifer, and he was described in glowing terms. The Bible speaks of him with the “seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezekiel 28:12). But all of that changed when he tried to stand in the place of God. He was “cast as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” (v. 16).

The portrayal of the devil as a monster with horns and a pitchfork crept into the church during the Middle Ages, when Christian leaders combined pagan religions with Bible teachings. It not only corrupted many doctrines, it also brought in a mixture of pagan deities that were modified to connect with characters in Scripture. In the ancient Greek religion, one mythological figure was the demigod Pan, who is shown with the hindquarters, legs, and horns of a goat.

Artists during this period made paintings and sculptures showing the devil in these grotesque ways, sometimes with chicken legs, or covered in animal hair, or with scars and boils and other deformities. Combined with these twisted pictures is the unbiblical view that the devil is now in hell. The Bible says he “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is not trapped in hell but roams the Earth to deceive and destroy (Job 1:7).

I think the devil is delighted to have himself pictured as a strange mythological figure. He knows that thinking people will reject monsters and fables, and so they deny his existence. But those who do not believe he exists are most likely to be captured by his wiles. The Scriptures teach that Satan deceives (Revelation 12:9), works miracles (John 8:44), misquotes the Bible (Matthew 4:5, 6), and even calls fire from heaven (Revelation 13:13). The devil is real, and we should not be deceived by his lies.



Dear Jesus, thank you for conquering Satan at the cross. I look only to you for light and truth.



For Further Study: Revelation 2:10; Job 2:7; Luke 13:16

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Will the wicked be able to see the righteous who are inside the New Jerusalem?



“Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (Psalm 37:34).

Someone once asked Jesus, “Are there few who are saved?” (Luke 13:23). Christ encouraged people to strive to be in His kingdom, and then warned, “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out” (v. 28). This verse, along with Psalm 37:34, seems to indicate that the wicked will see the righteous and the righteous will see the wicked before the final destruction of sin and sinners.

You might wonder how people inside a walled city could see out or those on the outside could see in. John gives us a clue when he describes the Holy City as it comes down out of heaven to this earth: “Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11). And also, “The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass” (v. 18). It’s hard to imagine something so beautiful and transparent!

At the end of the millennium, the Bible tells us Satan will be released to deceive the nations one last time. As he gathers people from all over the earth, it says, “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Revelation 20:9). We don’t exactly know how long these events will take, but verse three tells us the devil is released for “a little while.”

This does mean there could be some very sad encounters at the walls of the New Jerusalem before fire comes down to destroy the wicked. Perhaps the saved could look through the walls and see outside the sad faces of lost family and friends on the other side looking back at them. Such possible heartache should move us to work and pray earnestly for all those we love to be inside the kingdom, including ourselves.



Dear Lord, help me to be a faithful witness and encourage all those I love to accept you into their lives.



For Further Study: Matthew 13:42; 25:11, 12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Doesn't Revelation 6:9 show that souls never die?

"When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (Revelation 6:9, 10).



One of the rules for interpreting prophecy in the Bible is to remember that apocalyptic literature (books like Daniel and Revelation) is full of symbolism. Unless the text is pointedly clear, the pictures presented are often representations of truth or an idea. As with Jesus' parables, we need to be careful to not squeeze more out of the text than was intended.

The first people who read Revelation were beginning to suffer persecution for their faith. It only increased as time went on. Christians went through severe trials during the Middle Ages and during the Reformation. Many gave their lives in order to be true to God. The message of the fifth seal is filled with hope for all who face the sword or the stake for Jesus. God sees the suffering and will someday bring about justice.

Some take the symbolic picture presented in the fifth seal in a literal sense. Are people who died for their faith somehow still alive? The Bible says the "dead know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Just like Abel's blood that "cried" from the ground (Genesis 4:10), God is very aware of the death of all of His children. Each one is precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15).

The altar pictured here is probably the bronze altar that stands before the throne of God. There is a Jewish tradition that all of God's people are symbolically buried under this altar, so perhaps this belief was used to give a visual picture of the injustice brought on the Lord's people.

What will happen at the second coming? "I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness. . . . They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4).



*Dear Lord, you have not forgotten those
who have died for you. Someday soon
you will make everything right.*





Why did animals need to be sacrificed in the Old Testament sanctuary services?



*“According to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission”
(Hebrews 9:22).*

The sacrificing of animals was necessary to help people understand that without the shedding of Jesus' blood, their sins could never be forgiven. The ugly, shocking truth is that the punishment for sin is eternal death. Since all of us have sinned, all of us should die. When Adam and Eve sinned, they would have died at once except for Jesus, who stepped forward and offered to give His perfect life as a sacrifice to pay the death penalty for all people.

After sin, God required the sinner to bring an animal sacrifice (Genesis 4:3–7). When a sinner brought a sacrificial animal to the door of the courtyard, a priest handed him a knife and a basin. The sinner laid his hands on the animal's head and confessed his sins. This symbolized the transfer of sin from the sinner to the animal. At that point, the sinner was considered innocent and the animal guilty. Since the animal was now symbolically guilty, it had to pay sin's wage—death.

The sinner was to kill the animal with his own hand (Leviticus 1:4,5). It was bloody and shocking. By slaying the animal, the sinner was graphically taught that sin caused the innocent animal's death and that his sin would cause the death of the innocent Jesus. It indelibly impressed the sinner with the solemn reality of sin's awful consequences (eternal death) and the desperate need of a Savior.

The sacrificial system taught, through the symbol of the slain animal, that God would give His Son to die for their sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). Jesus would become not only their Savior, but also their substitute (Hebrews 9:28). When John the Baptist met Jesus, he said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). In the Old Testament, people looked forward to the cross for salvation. We look backward to Calvary for salvation. There is no other source of salvation.



*Dear Jesus, thank you for shedding your blood
on Calvary that I might be set free. May I
never forget the consequences of sin.*



For Further Study: Romans 6:23; Revelation 13:8; Acts 4:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



If some foods are unclean, why does the Bible say every creature made by God is good?

“Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4).



Sometimes in an effort to prove a point, we are tempted to take a single Bible verse as a “proof text” to support our claim. That’s not necessarily bad if the text truly proves a point. However, a good Bible student will not only look at every Scripture on a given subject, but he or she will also study the context around each passage. By doing this, we see exactly *which* creatures God is speaking about.

Verse three states that some people were telling Christians they should not marry and were “commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” The question we need to ask is, “Which foods did God create for us to receive?” We know from Genesis 1:29 that the Lord’s first diet for humans was a vegetarian menu. There was no animal flesh on the ideal menu.

Then we discover that, after the worldwide flood wiped out all trees and plants, God permitted people to eat meat. The context of Genesis 9:3, 4, stipulates that blood was not to be eaten. Since Noah was given careful instructions about clean and unclean animals (Genesis 7:2; 8:20), we can assume he did not eat unclean meats. Much greater detail about clean and unclean meats is outlined in Leviticus 11. Never in the Bible is this ban lifted.

The apostle Paul is warning his friend Timothy about people who depart from the faith and give heed to “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). In contrast, true followers of God live their lives by teachings that are “sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (v. 5). When the Lord’s people prayerfully study the Word, they will “know the truth” about “foods which God created to be received” (v. 3). Rather than following “lies” from people with a “conscience seared with a hot iron” (v. 2), they live by the clear doctrines found in the Bible.



*Dear Lord, for all the foods you have given
as good to eat, I will give you thanks.*





How will the destruction of wicked angels and people affect God?



“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Sometimes we try to place on God the attributes of sinful human beings. We think that the Lord somehow feels like we do about wicked people, especially those who have deeply hurt us or our family and friends. But God is not like us. The Lord says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8). This is true when it comes to the punishment of evil.

While it is accurate to say that God will punish sinful people who do not turn from their ways, destroying them in the lake of fire where they will be totally consumed, it is not done with delight. Listen to God’s heart in Scripture. Ezekiel presents the emotions of a Father who cries for His children.

I am touched by these words depicting this longing for the lost: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred” (Hosea 11:8). Any normal parent can sense the terrible pain in God’s heart when He looks at His wayward children.

Sadly, even Jesus’ disciples didn’t sense that the teacher they came to love was similar in character to God the Father. Notice how Christ presented the Father: “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; *for the Father Himself loves you*, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (John 16:26, 27, my emphasis).

All of our heavenly family will grieve over the destruction of those who refuse to receive the gift of eternal life. It should motivate us now to reach out to them before it is too late.



Dear Jesus, may your compassionate heart stir me to reach out to those who do not truly know your love.



For Further Study: 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:4; Psalm 103:8



Are health laws in the Bible really that important—isn't it enough to just love God?

"Having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).



Imagine with me for a moment a man who courts a woman for a couple years. He sends her letters and flowers. He takes her on dates and spends lots of time communicating his heart to her. He listens and cares about her needs. This man goes out of his way to be attentive because he is in love.

But what would happen if he sat around and watched TV all day after they get married? What if he never tried to get a job, never assisted around the house, never took her on dates, and never listened to her heart? What would you think if you confronted him and he replied, "I love my wife; isn't that enough?" My response would be, "What kind of love is that?"

Salvation can never be earned by obedience, but obedience is the result of exercising faith in Christ. When we truly love Jesus, we will want to obey Him (John 14:15). It will be the natural bent of our heart. We will see God's laws of health not as restrictions to take away our fun, but as guidelines that protect us and lead us into a happier life.

Obedience to God's health laws goes hand in hand with faith. Some people think their faith means these laws are meaningless. But the Bible says, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). My faith in Jesus will lead me to ask, "How can I show my love for a Savior who gave His life for me?"

Following all sorts of health laws out of a legalistic obligation driven by an effort to "earn" salvation will never work. It is a focus based on ourselves and not on Christ. But genuine faith that accepts God's free offer of salvation will transform our hearts and lead us to care for our bodies because it is through our minds that we study the Bible and listen to the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts.



Dear Jesus, I choose to care for my health because I truly love you.





Is it true that the little horn power in Daniel 8 was King Antiochus Epiphanes?



“And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land” (Daniel 8:9).

There are many Bible commentaries that attempt to squeeze Antiochus Epiphanes into Daniel 8, but it just doesn't fit for many reasons. The first relates to Daniel 8:9, which describes the little horn as growing exceedingly great. A simple study of Jewish history shows this never happened with the Seleucid king.

Another reason is found in verse 23, “In the *latter time* of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise” (my emphasis). Antiochus did not arise at a “latter time” or near the end of the Seleucid kingdom, as the prophecy mandates.

Some scholars attempt to interpret the 2,300 days as literal days (v. 14) in this prophecy in order to fit Antiochus Epiphanes. But this violates the principle of prophetic interpretation, which takes a day for a year (Numbers 14:34). Taking this literal time period of a little more than six years has no meaningful application to Daniel 8. All attempts to make this literal time period fit the Seleucid king fail.

Another question we must face is found in Daniel 8:17, where Gabriel explains to Daniel, “Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to *the time of the end*” (my emphasis). Antiochus died in 164 BC, hardly the time of the end!

Looking once more at Daniel 8:9, the prophet saw that this little horn grew exceedingly great in the south, the east, and the Glorious Land (Palestine). Although Antiochus did temporarily rule in Palestine, he had almost no success in Egypt (south) and Macedonia (east). The text just does not fit the history of this king.

We must be careful to not allow those who doubt the validity of God's Word to determine our beliefs. Some do not want to accept the truth about the identification of the little horn, and they attempt to point in a direction that does not fit the Bible. We'll next look at a few more reasons this effort has failed.



Dear Jesus, give me wisdom to rightly divide your Word so that I may know truth.



For Further Study: Ezekiel 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:15



Is it true that the little horn power in Daniel 8 was King Antiochus Epiphanes?

“He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down” (Daniel 8:11).



There are a few more good reasons that Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king from the first century BC, does not fit the description of the “little horn” in Daniel 8. Verse 11 says, “The place of His sanctuary was cast down” by him. Antiochus never destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. He did profane it, but it was completely demolished by the Romans in AD 70. Furthermore, the prophecy states that he “shall destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Daniel 9:26). Antiochus never destroyed Jerusalem.

Christ applied the desolating abominations of Daniel 9:26 and 27 to the immediate future, not the past outrages of Antiochus in 167 BC. Jesus saw that the Roman armies would destroy Jerusalem and the temple in His own generation (Luke 21:20–24). In Matthew 24:15, Jesus specifically mentioned the prophet Daniel and said that his prediction in Daniel 9 would be fulfilled when the Christians would see (in the future) the abomination of desolation “stand in the holy place” in Jerusalem. This is too clear to be misunderstood.

Finally, Jesus unmistakably related the destruction of Jerusalem to Israel’s final refusal to accept Him as the King and Savior (Matthew 21:33–43). This relationship between rejecting the Messiah and the destruction of the city and temple is the crucial message of Daniel 9:26, 27. It is a prophecy announcing the consequences of Israel’s continued rejection of the Messiah—even after 490 years of loving patience.

Attempting to apply this prophecy in Daniel 8 and 9 to Antiochus Epiphanes, who died in 164 BC, long before Jesus’ birth, completely destroys the meaning of these two chapters, which contain one of the most important time prophecies in the entire Bible.



Dear Jesus, may I realize the consequences of rejecting you and never turn my back on your Word. Thank you for prophecies that confirm the truth of the Bible.



For Further Study: Luke 19:41–44

Scan for more on this topic. ►



Is it really possible for someone to be lost who truly thinks he is saved?



“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Have you ever been driving down the freeway on a beautiful day and enjoying yourself when suddenly you notice flashing red and blue lights behind you? Your first thought might be, “Oh no! Was I speeding?” You glance down and, sure enough, you’re going 15 miles-an-hour over the speed limit. What would the highway patrol officer say to you if you told him, “But I didn’t *mean* to speed!” or “I *thought* I was going the speed limit!”

The fact is—you still broke the law.

Likewise, Jesus warns us that some people might *think* they are going down the road to heaven, enjoying themselves, and minding their own business. But what they think does not change God’s expectations. Christ said you can know that you are on the path to eternal life if you are seeking to do “the will of My Father in heaven.” Truth is not shaped by our feelings or hopes. It stands solid, regardless of what we might think. So how do we know we are doing God’s will?

We know we are going in the right direction when there is an intimate connection between ourselves and the Lord. It’s more than just doing the “right” things. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’” (Matthew 7:22). These are all good things, but there is something more that goes deeper than outward actions.

Jesus explains to outward doers of the law, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (v. 23). When we try to carry out God’s law without a changed heart, the actions are worthless. It shows that we are not really doing God’s will because our motives have not changed. People who have the assurance of salvation live lives of service motivated by unselfish love. This is the will of the Father in heaven.



*Dear Jesus, am I headed down the right road?
Am I doing the Father’s will? Lead me today.*



For Further Study: 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12; John 15:1–17; 2 Corinthians 13:5

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Why does the Bible share repugnant and graphic descriptions of sin? Is it really necessary?

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).



The fact that the Bible openly shares the sins of different people is one reason it has such credibility. Archaeologists have discovered many histories of kings and kingdoms; most of their battle scenes and depictions of royalty are exaggerated and leave out the defects of main characters, which the Bible does not do.

Even today, biographies skip over or soften the bad and overstate the good. So “telling it like it is” gives people more confidence that the Bible can be trusted. It doesn’t cover up everything or give a glorified picture of Israel or Jesus’ disciples.

The winner of a war often gets to chronicle the story, and it’s often more glorification and propaganda than fact. There are hundreds of examples of efforts to cover up the facts regarding nations that have committed war crimes—even retouching photos to hide the truth. The Bible does not gloss over the sins of even its greatest leaders, such as King David, who not only committed adultery, an acceptable practice of most kings in those days, but also murder to cover up his trail.

Satan wants to convince people that we are such terrible sinners that God could never save us. Yet time and again, the Lord redeems His people. When Israel turned away from the Lord, the nation was exiled into Babylon. Yet God heard their cries and said, “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine’” (Isaiah 43:1).

We can learn from David, who repented and was forgiven by God. We can have hope when we read of how Peter denied Christ, but bitterly wept and was restored. Such stories strengthen our faith.



Father in heaven, when I see the fallen saints of old standing back up in faith, may it encourage me to press on.





Is it safe to ask God for a sign that He wants me to obey?



*“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah”
(Matthew 12:39).*

There are some examples in the Bible in which people have asked the Lord for a sign and God responded to their request. Gideon was an Old Testament soldier called by God to lead an army and save Israel from the Midianites. He humbly asked for more than one sign, to which the Angel of the Lord obliged (see Judges 6:11–40).

But in the New Testament, we find a sobering statement by Christ to the scribes and Pharisees who said, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You” (Matthew 12:38). You might think this is an innocent request, but if you look at the whole chapter, you see constant opposition against Jesus. They accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath, they plot to destroy Him, and claim He uses the power of Satan.

It is to these wicked leaders to whom Christ said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.” Jesus had plainly spoken to them. Evidence of His divine mission had already been shown, yet they continued to resist Him. Unlike Gideon, their motives were not genuine. They were not seeking to believe, but to destroy. A sign would not change their hearts. They were not interested in God’s truth.

Christ once said of these stubborn religious leaders, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Notice their response to Lazarus being raised from the dead. “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.’ . . . Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death” (John 11:47, 53).

When the Word of God has been plainly spoken, we do not need a sign to determine whether we should obey the Lord. If our motive is to follow God, He will make the truth plain to us.



*Dear Lord, may I search your Word first
when seeking to follow you in obedience.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 8:19, 20; 2 Timothy 2:15; John 7:17

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Did Moses and Elijah actually appear with Jesus at the transfiguration, or was it only a vision?

"Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:3).



After Peter, James, and John saw the transfiguration, Matthew writes, "As they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead'" (Matthew 17:9). Some people have wondered what is meant by the word "vision." Did they really see Jesus with Moses and Elijah, or was it simply a dream?

We have reasons to believe this was a literal event. First, Matthew says that Moses and Elijah "appeared" to them and spoke with Christ. Second, we can find in the Bible that these two prophets are not sleeping in their graves, but are alive in heaven. Jude 9, for instance, speaks of a dispute over the body of Moses, which could only mean Satan wanted to prevent Christ from resurrecting him from the dead. And 2 Kings 2, 1, 11, and 12, clearly show us that Elijah did not taste death but was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire.

It's helpful to remember that English words have been translated from the Greek (in the New Testament) and that the word "horama" rendered as "vision" in verse 9, can also mean "spectacle" or, literally, "that which is seen." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Tell no one what you saw." It was wise counsel, since it would have only raised curiosities and not served a good purpose as much as it did after Christ's resurrection.

Moses and Elijah were religious leaders who suffered terrible onslaughts from the devil and from God's own people. They understood what Jesus was passing through and came to encourage Him and remind Him of all who would be brought into the kingdom. Some, like Moses, would experience death but be resurrected. Others, when Christ comes, will be like Elijah and not taste death. These two men were the perfect representatives of heaven to give support to Jesus, who was about to face the greatest tribulation of anyone through all time.



Dear Jesus, just as you were glorified while on earth, may I be prepared to see you glorified at your second coming.



For Further Study: Matthew 5:17; Exodus 24:12–18; 1 Kings 19:8–19

Scan for more on this topic. ►





When it comes to salvation, are sincerity and zeal enough?



"[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

One of the sincerest religious people in the Bible was Saul of Tarsus. He explained his credentials by stating, "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today" (Acts 22:3).

But his fervor took a sudden turn: "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women, as also the high priest bears me . . . from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished" (vv. 4, 5).

When it came to salvation, the man who would become the apostle Paul didn't need more zeal. He needed a converted heart. We can sincerely try to do what we think is right, but it might be very wrong. That's why we must come before the searcher of all hearts; we must expose ourselves to Bible truth and ask God to convict us of sin. Unless we repent and turn from self, our best efforts to do right are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). The most respected religious teacher in Israel, Nicodemus, was told quite directly by Christ that he needed to be "born again" (John 3:3).

Zeal and sincerity are not bad in and of themselves, but in an unconverted heart they can lead us astray, like in the life of Saul. If we were to replace the word zeal for "my best efforts" and then ask, "Will not my best efforts save me?" the Bible answer is "No!" Even good works will not save us. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).



Dear Lord, there is nothing good within me to earn salvation. I choose to accept your free gift today.



For Further Study: James 4:17; Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:8



Doesn't it make good sense for governments to pass laws enforcing Christianity?

"If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).



One of the great principles of freedom is to worship according to the dictates of one's own conscience. God doesn't force people to accept the gift of salvation or to follow His laws. People can freely turn away if they so choose. Guarding this principle once drove the Protestant theologian Roger Williams out of the original colonies! He insisted that every person should have liberty to worship God according to the light of his own convictions.

The U.S. Constitution explains these rights: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of public trust under the United States." And also, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The framers of our constitution had only to look back into their history to recognize that some of the most cruel wars and persecutions grew from governments who insisted on passing laws to enforce Christianity.

The Lord knows that people forced to obey laws won't live them out of a heart filled with gratitude and love. The Bible teaches, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). Living out of fear of being punished is not how the government of God functions. The Lord desires us to live out of reason and devotion to Him.

It is the mark of Satan's government to use force to control individual thought. The devil's hand has shaped many despots, kings, and rulers to insist people follow laws that determine when, where, and how they must worship. Those who disobeyed were threatened, tortured, banned, and sometimes murdered—all in the name of Christianity. It should never be the role of earthly governments to regulate how people are to worship God.



*Dear Lord, I choose to freely worship you
out of a heart of love and gratitude.*





Does the Bible teach there is more than one antichrist?



“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

The word “antichrist” comes from two words: “anti,” which means “against” or “in place of,” and “christ,” which means “anointed one,” referring to Christ. Any person who attempts to take the place of Jesus is an antichrist. The first person to strive toward this end, of course, was Satan. One of his primary methods is deception; he pretends he is Christ.

The apostle John tells us in this verse that the Antichrist (with a capital “A”) is coming. In other words, it was still in the future in John’s day. Then he adds that many antichrists (with a small “a”) have come. He later says, “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (v. 22). False teachers in John’s day were against Christ and, therefore, were a type of antichrist.

But the Bible teaches that there is a specific Antichrist power that will rise up in the last days. This power was also predicted by the apostle Paul. “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4).

There are many other identifying points to this last-day power spoken of throughout Scripture. The Antichrist will work with a religious and political system (Revelation 13:4), seek to destroy God’s people (vv. 15–17), and change God’s law (Daniel 7:25). It will attempt to take the place of Christ’s priestly work (8:11) and will even perform miracles to deceive (Revelation 13:13). Recent history reveals only one entity that specifically fulfills all these characteristics of the Antichrist.



Dear Lord, I will not put my ultimate destiny in the hands of any human being, but only in you will I trust.



For Further Study: 2 John 7; Isaiah 14:13; Ezekiel 28:14–16
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does the Bible mean when it says “the spirit of Elijah” in Luke 1:17?

“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).



Have you ever been lost while on a road trip? Maybe you just kept driving, hoping to find some sign or familiar landmark to get you back on track. Finally, you pulled over and asked someone for help, and the person smiled and pointed out the way. Relieved, you jumped back in your car and were on your way!

In many ways, the person who helped you is like Elijah the Tishbite.

The message of Elijah “turned” people in a different direction. Some commentators believe one way to interpret “Tishbite” is “converter”—that is, someone who changes people’s direction and gets them moving in the right way. That’s what Elijah did on Mount Carmel, proving the uselessness of the priests of Baal. The prophet turned people back to the true God of Israel.

The writer Luke explains how John the Baptist would also turn the hearts of children back to their fathers. Even more telling, it would turn “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” We know that people who disobey God are walking away from Him. They’ve turned their backs, much like rebellious children walking away from the wisdom of their parents. The wisdom of the just is found by how the just live: “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

John the Baptist turned hearts back to God. His work of guiding disobedient people to have faith in Christ put many people back on the path to the kingdom of heaven. It’s exciting to know that the message of Elijah will once more be given before Christ returns. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5). We are each called to be like Elijah in these last days, turning people to Jesus.



*Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the
opportunity to turn to you. May I be an
Elijah, helping guide others to Jesus.*





Why did John the Baptist say that he was not Elijah when Jesus said that he was?



"Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He ... confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not'" (John 1:19–21).

Once read about a brilliant boy diagnosed with autism who has an IQ higher than Einstein had. Some have even called him "the new Einstein." At only 14 years old, he was already working on a master's degree in quantum physics. Of course, everyone knows this boy is not actually Albert Einstein, but rather that he shows traits similar to the German-born theoretical physicist.

Likewise, when the religious leaders asked John the Baptist if he was actually Elijah the prophet come down from heaven, the forerunner of Jesus plainly told them, "No." So why did Jesus say of John, "If you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14)? Here is how an angel explained to John's father what his son would be like: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him *in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (Luke 1:16, 17, my emphasis).

The work of John the Baptist was just like that of Elijah. Facing a generation of Israelites who needed to turn back to God, both prophets spoke strong messages of rebuke, calling for people to repent and change their ways. John had traits very similar to the Old Testament prophet: Both spoke against fallen religious leaders; both challenged the status quo; and both rebuked the immorality of political leaders.

It was a popular belief in Christ's time that Elijah would physically return to the earth. John was simply saying that he wasn't a reincarnated or resurrected Elijah, while Christ was saying, "This man is the essence of the Elijah you are seeking."



*Dear Jesus, may I help turn the hearts of children
back to the faith of the heavenly Father.*



For Further Study: Matthew 17:10; Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:2, 3



Since the sins of God's people were transferred to the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, doesn't that make him our sin-bearer as well?

"Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat" (Leviticus 16:8).



On the annual Day of Atonement in ancient Israel, the high priest was instructed to bring two goats before the Lord and to cast lots over them. One was chosen to be for the Lord, and the other to be the "scapegoat." (The Hebrew word *azazel* means "goat sent away.") The Lord's goat was sacrificed as an offering; the scapegoat was not sacrificed but led away. After the priest made atonement for the people, he confessed all the sins over the scapegoat, which was then led away into the wilderness to die.

Some have attempted to identify this scapegoat as representing Christ since He "bore the sin of many" (Isaiah 53:12). It is certainly true that Jesus bore our sins, but the context of Leviticus 16 and other passages show this could not be true of the scapegoat. While Christ was sacrificed for our sins, the scapegoat was not sacrificed but, instead, led away. The Hebrew phrase "to bear sin" is more accurately translated in Leviticus 16:22 as "to carry sin." This goat does not vicariously bear the sin of the people, but simply carries it into the wilderness.

The scapegoat actually represents Satan. The devil in no way "bears," or pays for, our sins. The Lord's goat, which was sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, represents Jesus, who assumed and paid for our sins. Satan will be punished (as will all other sinners—see Revelation 20:12–15) for his own sins, which will include responsibility for (1) the existence of sin, (2) his own evil actions, and (3) influencing every person on Earth to sin. God will clearly hold him accountable for evil. This is what the symbolism of the transfer of sin to the scapegoat (Satan) on the Day of Atonement is meant to convey. In cleansing the universe from sin, the Lord will finally put the greatest punishment against the one who introduced sin into a perfect universe.



Dear Lord, thank you for ultimately destroying all sin and making the universe a safe place once more.



For Further Study: Number 14:18; Isaiah 53:4; Ezekiel 28:17–19

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Does a person have any role at all to play in becoming righteous by faith?



“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

If you picture that salvation is a matter of simply saying a short prayer and then sitting around like a couch potato, you’re missing the point of what it means to be saved from sin. God wants to give us a new heart. This happens through our *cooperation* with divine power. We use our free will to seek to do God’s will. This is a daily choice. Even in the Old Testament, God’s people continued to bring a lamb to the temple, not just once, but as often as they sinned. We need to exercise an ongoing faith and have a wholehearted desire to let the Lord totally lead in our lives.

We cannot change ourselves. There is no power within us to become righteous. We need help from the outside. We must daily recommit to Jesus and invite Him to control our lives. He is the one who performs the miracle. We earnestly *work with* God by abiding in Jesus. We must be willing to be obedient and to follow where Jesus leads (Isaiah 1:18–20).

Sin causes us to want to have our own way (Isaiah 53:6) and, thus, rebel against the Lord, just as Satan did in the beginning (Isaiah 14:12–14). Permitting Jesus to rule our lives is sometimes as difficult as having an eye plucked out (Matthew 5:29, 30), because sin is addictive and can be overcome only by God’s miraculous power (Mark 10:27).

Many believe that Jesus will take all who merely profess salvation to heaven, regardless of their conduct afterward. But according to Matthew 7:21, this is not true. It is a fabrication of Satan. A converted Christian must and will follow Jesus’ lifestyle (1 Peter 2:21). The powerful blood of Jesus can accomplish this for all (Hebrews 13:12), but only if we give Jesus full control of our lives and follow where He leads—even though the path might sometimes be rough.



Lord, I do not want to settle for anything less than complete surrender to you so that you can truly change my life.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 15:31; John 12:26; Matthew 7:13, 14, 21



Will every person on Earth actually be reached with the gospel before Jesus returns?

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).



It is staggering to look at the population of our world and see the statistics. For more than 5,000 years, population growth was quite flat. But the Industrial Revolution changed everything. Consider that it took all of human history to reach a population of one billion in the 1800s. The second billion came within 130 years (1930). The third billion was reached in only 30 years (1959), and the fourth billion in just 15 years (1974). The fifth billion came 13 years later (1987). It's still unbelievable that in the 20th century alone, the world grew from 1.65 billion to 6 billion.

How can all of these people be reached with the gospel? It would take supernatural power for that to happen. Just as a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit launched the spread of the gospel in the first century, so a special “latter rain” will be given to ripen Earth’s harvest at the end of time (Joel 2:23; James 5:7).

Jesus promised, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Now with modern media—TV, the Internet, radio—it’s easy to see how the gospel can be placed within reach of the whole world in this generation.

Of course, not everyone will believe and respond to the message of the Bible. It’s also true that many have already heard the gospel. If you really want a taste of seeing the spread of truth, read the book of Acts. The message of this book is that the gospel was shared with the then-known world through the power of the Spirit in one generation!

I like to think of it as a domino effect. I share the good news with a few people; many of those, in turn, share Jesus with many more; and then those people continue exponentially reaching others. I think God doesn’t work just with the “addition” method, but the “multiplication” approach to growing His church.



Dear Jesus, use me to be a witness for the everlasting gospel by sharing with someone today.



For Further Study: Colossians 1:23; Jonah 3:4–10; Romans 9:28

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Is it okay to refuse to pay tithe if I don't agree with what the church is doing with it?



"All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD"
(Leviticus 27:30).

Tithing is a command of God (Malachi 3:10). Tithe is holy money that belongs to the Lord; you return tithe to Him only. Of course, the Lord is able to care for these gifts to His church, so your first responsibility is to tithe. He has chosen individuals to decide how to use tithe based on His guidelines. If they make a mistake, that shouldn't stop you from fulfilling your responsibility.

The Bible says we are to bring the whole tithe to the storehouse in the community where we live (see Malachi 3:10). Old Testament priests did not live only in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:27). They were scattered throughout Israel (Nehemiah 11:1). Yet tithe was still brought to the Levites as God's ministers, wherever they lived. They in turn brought a tenth of the tithes they received to the temple (Nehemiah 10:37, 38; Numbers 18:25–32).

It's natural for people to want to show honor to their local pastor. But this should not be the motivation for returning tithes. Our desire should spring from our love for God and a commitment to follow Scripture guidelines, regardless of how we feel about our pastor.

It is possible that funds could be misused, but it doesn't excuse us from this Christian responsibility to tithe. The chances of gifts being mishandled are probably low. If a member gives to a ministry that has appropriate financial accountability structures in place, he or she can trust that the gift will go to the right place. If there is a concern, there are appropriate channels for remedy.

It's interesting that Jesus chose to pay a temple tax even though He knew this very organization would condemn Him to die (Matthew 17:24–27). He also honored a widow who gave her last few coins to this same church because she was seeking to honor God (Mark 12:41–44). The possibility of mishandling funds should not deter us from returning our tithes to the Lord.



*Dear Lord, thank you for the privilege of
returning to you what is already yours.*



For Further Study: Haggai 2:8; Proverbs 3:9, 10; Matthew 23:23
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Why didn't Adam and Eve die the very day they sinned?

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"
(Genesis 2:16, 17).



First, Adam and Eve did experience a spiritual death the very day they disobeyed God—they became aware of their nakedness. They also began to experience the slow physical breakdown from the aging process.

The Bible actually speaks of two separate deaths. The first death is the one we will all die if Jesus doesn't come in our lifetime. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). In the second death, the wicked will die in hellfire at the end of time (see Revelation 21:8).

It's important to understand that Jesus died the "second death" for every person. When Adam and Eve sinned, they instantly would have died the second death except for the fact that Jesus stepped forward and offered to die on Calvary for every person. His supreme sacrifice spared them. "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" (Hebrews 2:9).

When Adam sinned, his "undying" nature became a "dying" nature. Regarding the first death, the literal rendering of the word "die" in Genesis 2:17 is "dying you will die," which is noted in the margins of most Bibles. It means that Adam and Eve would enter into the process of dying. Before sinning, the couple possessed a sinless nature; this nature was maintained by eating from the tree of life. At the moment of sin, their natures changed to dying, sinful natures. This is what God had told them would happen. Because they were barred from the tree of life, decay and deterioration, leading finally to death, began immediately. The grave became a certainty.



*Dear Jesus, thank you for stepping in and dying
in my place so that I might have eternal life.*





What does the Bible mean when it says there will come a time when people who kill Christians think they are helping God?



“They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2).

In the days of the early church, the Jews persecuted the apostles and their followers. They believed these first evangelists were blasphemers who were trying to overthrow the religion that God had established. Notice, “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man [Stephen] does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us’” (Acts 6:13, 14). In the next chapter, we learn that he was killed for speaking out (Acts 7:54–60).

The same thing will happen in our day. The end-time coalition of world governments and religions will finally lose all sympathy for God’s people, who refuse to join a worldwide counterfeit revival. They will feel that the stunning miracles accompanying their revival prove its validity—miracles such as the sick being healed or notorious God-haters, immoral movie stars, drug lords, and well-known criminals being converted.

The church and state partnership will insist that no one be permitted to wreck this worldwide revival, which is drawing in all religions. Everyone will be urged to lay aside personal feelings and “fanatical teachings” (the Sabbath, for example) and join with the rest of the world in its sincere revival for peace and brotherhood. Everything other than the revival will be considered minor.

Those who do not agree to cooperate will be considered disloyal, unpatriotic, anarchists and, finally, dangerous fanatics who must not be tolerated. In that day, those who kill God’s people will feel they are doing God a favor.

Just as the Jews once thought to do God a favor by killing those who opposed their religious beliefs, so in the last days, there will rise up a fierce opposition to people who remain true to God and the Bible.



*Dear Lord, you are my refuge and strength,
a very present help in any time of trouble.*



For Further Study: Revelation 13:15; Acts 21:28–31; 2 Timothy 3:12
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What is the difference between accepting Jesus as my “Savior” and accepting Him as “Lord”?

“Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).



The difference between accepting Christ as a Savior and as a Lord is substantial. When I accept Him as Savior, He saves me from the guilt and penalty of sin and gives me the new birth. He changes me from sinner to saint. This transaction is a glorious miracle and is essential to salvation. No one can be saved without it. “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:18).

However, Jesus is not finished with me at this point. I have been born again, but His plan is that I also grow up to become more like Him, as Ephesians 4:13 says, into “the stature of the fullness of Christ.” When I accept Him daily as the ruler, or Lord, of my life, He, by His miracles, causes me to grow in grace and Christian conduct until I am mature in Christ.

The problem is that I want to run my own life, to have my own way. The Bible calls this mindset “iniquity,” or sin (Isaiah 53:6). Making Jesus my Lord is so important that the New Testament mentions Him as “Lord” 766 times. In the book of Acts alone, He is referred to as “Lord” 110 times and as “Savior” only twice. This demonstrates how important it is to know Him as Lord and Ruler of our lives.

Jesus placed continuing emphasis upon His Lordship because He knew that crowning Him Lord would be a forgotten and neglected imperative (2 Corinthians 4:5). Unless I make Him Lord of my life, there is no way I can ever become a full-grown Christian. Instead, I will end up “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” and, even worse, feeling that I “have need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17).



Dear Jesus, I accept you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for redeeming me and helping me grow into your likeness.





Since God created Lucifer, isn't He really responsible for sin?



"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (Ezekiel 28:15).

Not at all. God created Lucifer a perfect, sinless angel. Lucifer made a devil of himself. Freedom to choose is a cornerstone principle of God's government. The Lord knew Lucifer would sin when He created him. If at that point God had refused to create him, He would have been giving up that prime principle of free choice.

So knowing full well what Lucifer would do, God still created him. The same facts apply to the creation of Adam and Eve. And, closer to home, these facts apply to you and me. God knows before we are born how we will live, but even so, He permits us to live and to choose whether to endorse His government or Satan's. God is willing to be misjudged, falsely accused, and blamed for ages, while taking the time to allow every person to freely choose whom he or she will follow.

Only a loving God would risk granting full freedom for all. This glorious, crucial gift of freedom could come only from a just, open, and loving being. It is an honor and joy to serve such a Lord and friend. Freely choosing to follow the Lord leads to greater freedom. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). It is God's desire to set us free so that we are no longer "slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6).

The sin problem will soon end. John said, "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1). In the beginning, everything was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Now "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Soon Earth will be restored to God's original plan. Until then, people everywhere are choosing to serve God or Satan. Use your fantastic, God-given freedom to choose to serve the Lord.



*Dear Jesus, today I choose you. I turn
from the enemy and walk in obedience to
your law, which brings true freedom.*



For Further Study: Revelation 12:7–9; 20:10; Ezekiel 28:11–19



What are the false teachings in the “wine” of Babylon that make people spiritually drunk and confused?

“Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart” (Jeremiah 11:8).



Amazingly, some of the most prominent doctrines of Protestantism today are not found in the Bible at all. Paganism has been brought in to these churches. A few of these false teachings are:

1. The law of God has been amended or repealed. God’s law can never be changed or repealed. Jesus said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than” for the law to fail (Luke 16:17).
2. The soul is immortal. The Bible mentions “soul” and “spirit” 1,700 times. Not once is either referred to as immortal. People are mortal (Job 4:17), and none receive immortality until Jesus’ second coming. The apostle Paul writes that “we shall all be changed” *when* “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 53).
3. Sinners burn eternally in hell. The Bible teaches that sinners will be completely consumed (put out of existence), both soul and body, in the fires of hell (Matthew 10:28).
4. Baptism by immersion is not necessary. Baptism by immersion is the only baptism recognized by Scripture. Jesus came “up from the water” (Mark 1:10). The act itself symbolizes being “buried” with Christ (Colossians 2:12).
5. Sunday is God’s holy day. The Bible teaches, without question, that God’s holy day is the seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8–10).

When we accept the false teachings of Babylon, we will become confused, which is what the term “Babylon” literally means. It’s sobering to think that some might unknowingly be drinking Babylon’s wine. If this is all new to you, ask God to guide you (Matthew 7:7). Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11). Follow where Jesus leads, and you will not end up in error.



Dear Lord, I will follow you wherever you lead me; by your grace I will obey all your commands.



For Further Study: John 7:17; Revelation 18:4

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Why does it seem like I'm being harassed by the devil after joining God's end-time church?



"Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

The Bible tells us that our great enemy, the devil, is angry with God's remnant people. His desire is to hurt them, to discourage them, and ultimately to destroy them. Speaking of Satan and the church, the Bible says, "The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17).

There are many statements about trials and tribulations in Scripture. The Lord did not promise His people they would be immune to difficulties. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). King David wrote, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). God's people in every age have suffered for their faith in Him.

Yet we are not left without hope in the midst of our trials. "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 1:12). "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" (John 16:33).

Satan is full of hatred toward the Lord's children. He is bent on trying to turn you away from God. But even though such things will come, the Lord has not left us alone. Like the commander Joshua in leading God's people, the Lord says to you, "I will not leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). The tighter we hold onto God's hand during these trials, the safer we will be (John 10:28, 29).



Father in heaven, thank you for seeing me through trials. May I see them as opportunities to strengthen my hold upon you.



For Further Study: 1 Peter 5:10; Romans 12:12; James 1:2–8



What does it mean in Revelation that the Euphrates River dries up to make way for the kings of the east?

“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (Revelation 16:12).



Revelation is a book full of symbols that teach us about spiritual realities. Sometimes people are tempted to make parts of this apocalyptic vision literal when the prophecy itself is already explained in Scripture. Before looking at the Euphrates, let's focus for a moment on the kings of the east.

The Bible uses many references to the “east” as identifying the place from which God comes. The kings of the east are the Kings (Father and Son) of heaven. They are called kings of the east because that is the direction from which heavenly beings approach Earth.

Note the following, for example: Jesus' second coming will be from the east. “For as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27). God's glory comes from the east. “Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east” (Ezekiel 43:2). Revelation's sealing angel comes from the east. “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God” (Revelation 7:2).

What about the reference to the Euphrates? Before the ancient kingdom of Babylon was captured by the Median general Darius, the waters of the river Euphrates, which passed underneath the walls of the city, was diverted into a manmade lakebed. This diversion permitted Darius' army to capture the city at night by entering from underneath the walls through the empty riverbed.

In the prophecies of Revelation, “water” symbolizes people (Revelation 17:15). Thus, the waters of the river Euphrates refer to the followers of “Babylon the great,” whose support dries up when they turn against Babylon with the intent to destroy her (Revelation 17:16). This drying up of support for “Babylon the great” assures victory for the kings of the east, the Father and Son.



Dear Lord, I trust you to bring to an end the reign of Satan and to set up your glorious kingdom.





What does it mean when the Bible says Rachel's "soul was departing"?



"So it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin" (Genesis 35:18).

Some seek to interpret the word "soul" here to mean some immaterial, ghost-like, conscious entity that floats out of our bodies and up to heaven (or down to hell) when we die. This false teaching crept into the church not through the Bible, but from Greek mythology and thinking. Comparing this Bible verse with many others on the word "soul" helps to clarify that it simply refers to "life." In other words, when Rachel "was near death," she gave birth to Benjamin.

The Hebrew word used here is *nephesh* and is used 119 times in the Old Testament to refer to a person's life. "You shall not eat flesh with its life (*nephesh*), that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). Obviously, an immaterial spirit floating around doesn't have blood. The word also means "breath." Speaking of a giant sea creature, Job writes, "His breath (*nephesh*) kindles coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth" (Job 41:21). In fact, God said of the creation, "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life (*nephesh*)" (Genesis 1:30).

Solomon explains both people *and* animals have "breath" (*ruach*), which simply returns to God at death. "For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath" (Ecclesiastes 3:19). King David also tells what happens at death: "His spirit (breath) departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish" (Psalm 146:4).

The Bible teaches that when God created man, He combined the dust of the ground with His divine power by breathing into Adam (Genesis 2:7). These two components make a living soul (being). When a person dies, his body returns to the earth and the power of life returns to God. He ceases to be a soul (living being), and his thoughts perish.



Dear Lord, my life is in your hands. Whether in life or death, I await your blessed return.



For Further Study: Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5; 12:7

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does the symbolism of “frogs” mean in the book of Revelation?

“I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:13, 14).



Satan is a master of deception and provides counterfeits to everything that God has created to be good and true. This particularly comes through in the book of Revelation where we find Jesus, the Lamb of God, and His counterfeit, the “lamblike” beast (Revelation 13:11). Just as there is a true “triune” God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—there is also a false “trinity” seen in this verse: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They speak on behalf of Satan.

The Bible typically explains itself, and in this verse, it clearly states that the unclean spirits that are “like” frogs come from this false trinity. The frogs are obviously not literal but are simply John’s way of trying to describe these “spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth” (16:14). This evil trio of powers has been identified by many Bible teachers as paganism, the Roman church, and apostate Protestantism.

One of the primary ways we see false “signs” exhibited in a growing number of churches today is through a counterfeit of “speaking in tongues.” A frog captures its prey with his tongue, which could symbolize the false gift of tongues that is now sweeping the world. People believe that this “miracle” of tongues is evidence of God’s power. But this verse clearly shows that Satan can also exhibit supernatural power. He will be so effective that almost the entire world will follow him.

Like a frog using its tongue to capture its prey, Satan is using the counterfeit gift of tongues to weld together churches and religions of all kinds—including pagans and spirit worshipers. Each of these feels that the gift of tongues is proof of authenticity.



Dear Jesus, may I always compare the miraculous with the solid Word of truth so that I may never be deceived by false supernatural powers.





Did Satan's kingdom called "Babylon" originate at the tower of Babel?



"They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Genesis 11:4).

The tower of Babel spoken of in Genesis 11 was erected by the people of Shinar in opposition to God's instructions to "fill the earth" after the Flood. The Lord promised there would never be another flood to destroy the world, but these rebellious people built a tower reaching to the heavens in disbelief. The name Babel means "confusion" (v. 9) and refers to God's intervention by confusing the languages of the people.

The prophet Isaiah uses the king of Babylon as a symbol of Satan, who was once a covering cherub in heaven named Lucifer. In describing the downfall of Lucifer, he writes: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!" (Isaiah 14:12). The book of Revelation most clearly uses the nation of Babylon as a symbol for Satan's reign.

The origins of Satan's kingdom began with his rebellion in heaven, which ended in a war when he was cast out. "War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought. . . . So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7, 9). This happened before the tower of Babel story.

Certainly the rebellious spirit of the people of Shinar and the same proud spirit in the king of Babylon capture the essence of Satan's kingdom. From the beginning of Satan's sin, he has sought to exalt himself above God. His reign has brought false worship, and his purpose has been to take captive the Lord's people. Every soul on Earth will finally line up on the side of either Jesus or Babylon. It is a matter of life and death!



Dear Lord, may I heed Jesus' end-time warning against Babylon and turn to you.



For Further Study: Matthew 7:13, 14; Revelation 14:8; 18:2



Will the New Age movement play a role in the end-time conflict between good and evil?

*“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’ ”
(Genesis 3:4).*



The New Age movement is really an old age movement that’s been around since the devil first told Eve that she wouldn’t die if she disobeyed God’s command. The New Age movement has elements of older spiritual traditions that come from a wide range of “isms,” including pantheism, polytheism, environmentalism, astrology, and many Eastern religions. It’s really a hodgepodge of ideas that gained momentum in the 1960s and 70s when several “gurus” visited the United States.

There is a strong involvement in the New Age movement with the occult, psychic phenomena, and spiritism. Without a doubt, spiritism will be a major factor in the closing drama of Earth’s history. Combined with the supernatural power of the counterfeit gift of tongues and allied with the end-time worldwide coalition of churches, spiritism will sweep the globe. The New Age belief in spirit communication and reincarnation is simply old-time paganism in new garb. Its belief in an immortal, undying soul that can communicate with the living is the same old falsehood Satan told Eve in Eden.

And books aren’t the sole purveyors of this false religion. Television, film, and radio have been feeding society a steady diet of religious programming, most notably New Age spiritism. Shows like *Ghost Whisperer* and *Crossing Over* have a tremendous following, especially among young adults. Of course, the Harry Potter movies, aimed squarely at children, remain the standard for occult-oriented entertainment.

I know from personal experience that our only safety from being led astray is by personal Bible study. Without it, I might still be lost, perhaps steeped in the teachings of some New Age cult. It was the Bible that turned me into a Christian, which is kind of a miracle considering that I was a high school dropout from a Jewish family full of cynicism about Christianity. I’d been taught evolution and believed that the Bible was full of fiction and fantasy. Yet in a cave, all alone, I picked up the Bible and this dynamic, powerful book changed my life.



*Dear Lord, may I always turn to the best
source of all truth, the Holy Word of God.*





Is there really a danger that many Christians will be caught off guard when Jesus returns?



“Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (Luke 21:34).

Jesus makes it very clear that several things can trap and destroy Christians. He even told a story to illustrate His warning: “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:34–36).

Let’s consider the traps in Luke 21:34 along with Jesus’ warning in Mark. The first item is “carousing.” The original word comes from two Greek words, one for “head” and the other for “to sway or toss about.” The idea is that we can become so busy in life, so intoxicated with our adrenaline-driven schedules, that we lose our ability to think clearly. This rat race of constant running keeps us from spending daily time with Jesus.

Drunkenness, of course, speaks of the result of drinking alcoholic beverages, but it can refer to any addiction. People who have numbed their minds through pornography, illicit sex, romance novels, gambling, alcohol, drugs, movies, food, or evil companions are clinging to dependencies that keep them from Bible study, prayer, and Christian fellowship. They live in an unreal world trying to fill a void in their life that only Jesus can truly fill. Even the everyday cares of this life can so consume us that we don’t put first things first.

Finally, Mark 13 warns us that we can be spiritually asleep. It might be the biggest problem today. When a person is asleep, he doesn’t really know he is asleep. Taking our relationship with Jesus for granted can make sleepwalkers of those who, unless miraculously awakened, will sleep past the moment of truth.



Dear Lord, may I never get so caught up in the pleasures of this world that I forfeit my home in heaven.



For Further Study: 1 Thessalonians 5:4; 2 Timothy 2:26



China has barely been touched with the gospel—won't it take a long time to reach everyone there?

*“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible’”
(Mark 10:27).*



One of my favorite Bible stories is how God led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. What surprises many people is that the Lord basically led His people into a trap (Exodus 14:2). They found themselves enclosed by mountains with the Egyptians coming from behind and the Red Sea before them. It was an impossible situation! But God told Moses, “Tell the children of Israel to go forward” (v. 15). And the Red Sea parted for them.

When we look at spreading the gospel to every person on Earth, we peer at the situation through our own imperfect eyes, not with the eyes of God. It is not in our power that this work will be finished, but only in God's strength. The Bible says the Lord “will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth” (Romans 9:28). That same Lord who empowered Jonah to lead an entire city to repentance in less than 40 days (Jonah 3) will finish His work very quickly in these last days.

There are exciting developments in the gospel work in China at Amazing Facts. You might be surprised at how the Lord is using radio, television, satellite, the Internet, and mission-minded people to spread the everlasting gospel in the land of the red dragon. This crossroads of the ancient world has new pathways that we don't even know about. I personally believe God is doing a great work in this giant land filled with people hungering to know the Bible.

The Lord says His work will move with such breathtaking speed that it will be almost impossible for the church to adequately handle the overwhelming influx of souls (Amos 9:13). God promised it. It will happen. Soon and suddenly, it will all be over. People who put off preparing for Jesus' soon return will be surprised. We need to wake up before it is too late.



*Dear Lord, bless your work in China.
Continue opening many avenues to spread
the gospel in this great country.*





What does the word “church” mean?



“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Have you ever been sitting in the bleachers, watching others play a game, and someone called out to you, “Hey, we’re short one person—come join our side!” If you got up and joined their team, you became one of the “called out” persons. That’s what the Greek word for church literally means. The word *ekklesia* comes from two words: “out” and “to call.” Those who respond to Jesus’ call become part of the church, which is also called “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

In the secular Greek world, the word *ekklesia* described any group that gathered for a regular meeting, like a political rally. But in harmony with the Old Testament idea of a gathering or congregation, this word is especially applied to people who believed Jesus was the Messiah and chose to accept His teachings. They became part of a group and didn’t just live in isolation. There was an emphasis on being part of the body (Romans 12:4, 5).

Unfortunately, the church became corrupt. Pagan teachings infiltrated the doctrines, and certain practices distorted the truth. The false church came to be called Babylon, and, in the last days, a call is made to “come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). This false church is also compared to an impure woman (v. 3), whereas God’s true church and its followers are compared to a pure woman (Revelation 12:1).

How will you know if you are truly being “called out” to the right church? Study what the Bible says about God’s true people. This group will share the everlasting gospel with the entire world (Revelation 14:6, 7). These people are called a “remnant” who remain loyal to God and keep all His commandments in the last days (Revelation 12:17). And these followers are filled with the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

Those who respond to God’s call follow Peter’s words to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). When people are baptized into the body of Christ, they become part of His church (1 Corinthians 12:13).



Heavenly Father, thank you for the body of Christ. I choose to respond to your call.



For Further Study: 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–7

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Should we expect modern prophets to originate new doctrines?

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18, 19).



T rue end-time prophets will not originate new doctrine. The apostle John makes it clear that people who add or take away from the truth of Scripture are not being led by God. Any teaching that is not in harmony with the Word of God should be automatically dismissed. The Bible is the source of all doctrine, our sure foundation of truth. Isaiah warned, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

A true prophet is sort of like the moon, which reflects the sun. God’s prophets do not lift themselves up, but point others to the Lord and encourage people to have a closer walk with Jesus. They do not direct attention to themselves but on the Bible. They are like smaller lights pointing people to the greater light of truth in the Word of God. Sometimes they reveal a deeper understanding of Bible doctrine that was clear during a certain time. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

God’s prophets throughout time have helped protect His people from fanaticism, deception, and spiritual stupor. They have given direct messages to those who have turned from the Lord, rebuking, exhorting, and guiding them. Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal. Nathan challenged King David. Prophets helped to direct the early church.

John the Baptist prepared people for the first coming of Jesus. In the same way, God’s last-day prophets will help people understand the end-time prophecies that indicate Christ is coming soon. Their messages are always in harmony with the Bible.



Dear Lord, thank you for sending the prophets. May I believe and be established more deeply in your precious Word.





If the Bible is the sole source of truth, shouldn't we reject all modern-day prophets?



"Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21).

It is true that the source of all doctrine should be the Bible and the Bible only. But within the holy Scriptures, we are told that God gives the "gift of prophecy" to His church. The apostle Paul wrote, "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body" (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Such gifts help to bring us all into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). If we say that we believe in the Bible and the Bible only, we must naturally accept what it teaches about the prophetic gift.

For instance, Jesus' end-time church will have the gift of prophecy (Revelation 12:17; 19:10; 22:9). Of course, we're told that we must test all prophets and, if they speak in harmony with the Bible, we should follow their counsel. Sometimes our pride is wounded when we are rebuked by a prophetic message. We turn away from the message and attack the messenger. We live in danger of ignoring truth we don't want to hear because we feel slighted.

Notice Jesus' words regarding the prophetic work of John the Baptist: "I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." . . . And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers *rejected the will of God* for themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Luke 7:28–30, my emphasis).

Christians must follow the Bible's counsel regarding prophets. If I fail to listen to and test prophets, I am not basing my faith upon the Bible. Just remember that prophets who contradict God's Word are false and should be rejected.



Dear Jesus, may my heart be open to the messages of your prophets.



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28; Ezekiel 7:26; 1 John 4:1



Do you think more true prophets will appear between now and Jesus' second coming?

"It shall come to pass ... 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" (Joel 2:28, 29).



Based on Joel's prophecy, it certainly appears possible. Keep in mind that not all who call themselves prophets are true prophets. Jesus warns us there will also be false prophets. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Genuine prophets focus on uplifting Jesus and the Bible. A false prophet is interested in consuming and gaining attention to themselves.

If someone in the last days claims to be a prophet, they should be tested by what the Bible says about true prophets. For instance, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In addition to Christ's words about false prophets, He adds, "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). When a person who freely breaks God's law claims to be a true prophet, we know they are deceived.

Many have distorted views of the work of God's prophets. They picture some type of carnival palm reader who makes predictions for money and to tickle the fancy of the curious. We are often drawn to the sensational. But when you compare that image with John the Baptist, it just doesn't match.

I believe God has already sent His remnant church a prophet in these last days to guide and direct His people in preparation for Jesus' soon return. Could the Lord send another prophet? Yes. I don't think we should box God in and make predictions that are not in harmony with Joel's vision. But if a person should be raised up, we should follow the advice of Paul, who wrote, "Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21).



Dear Father in heaven, may I heed the warnings of your prophets and obey the truth.





What all is involved with proper Christian stewardship?



“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24, 25).

Stewardship involves the proper handling of “all things” that we receive from God. The Lord gives us many types of blessings beyond money: “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” (James 1:17). Even our life, breath, and bodies are gifts we should care for. Stewardship simply means to carefully and responsibly manage something.

Our talents are given to us by God to use for building up the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are distributed to all believers “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16, my emphasis).

Time is a gift from God and should be used in doing the work the Lord has assigned each one of us. “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch” (Mark 13:34). Are you using your time properly in witnessing for Christ (Acts 1:8)? In studying the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15)? In prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? In helping those in need (Matthew 25:31–46)?

I like to think of stewardship as a partnership with God. Jesus has given me the assurance of salvation. He is my Savior and friend. As I walk with Him, I want to obey and follow Him as Lord of my life. That means submitting everything I have to be used for His glory. I hold nothing back from serving God. I acknowledge that He gave me my life, talents, time, family, money, and so much more to be used for His work.



*Dear God, you gave all for me.
Help me to give all for you.*



For Further Study: Matthew 22:37–39; 1 Peter 4:10; Genesis 1:28



How do we handle those commands of God that seem unreasonable or too hard?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).



Children often feel that some of their parents’ requirements are unreasonable. For example, “Don’t play in the street” seems very restrictive to some kids. But in later years, the child will thank the parents for enforcing their rules.

We are “children” in dealing with God. He tells us, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Since He can see the end from the beginning, God very much knows the ultimate results of poor choices. He knows all the traps of temptation that could cause us harm. We need to trust our loving heavenly Father in the few areas we might not understand and stop “playing in the street” if that is what He asks of us.

God’s rules are not arbitrary; they are for our benefit, to keep us from doing hurtful things. God wants only to bless us. The Bible says, “For the LORD GOD IS A SUN AND SHIELD. . . . NO GOOD THING WILL HE WITHHOLD from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11). When we are truly in love with Jesus, we will give Him the benefit of the doubt and do His will even if we do not always understand why.

The new birth is the key. The Bible says that when I am truly born again, overcoming the world will not be a problem because a converted person will have the faith and trust to happily follow Jesus in everything. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4). Choosing to follow Him, even when we are not clear on His reasons, shows that our trust in our Savior is genuine.



Heavenly Father, please help me realize that your law is a hedge of safety. Help me to trust and obey you even when I don’t understand all of your reasons.





Are preachers today paid too much money according to godly stewardship?



“The laborer is worthy of his wages” (Luke 10:7).

Yes, without doubt, many preachers are paid far more than they earn. Jesus said that “the laborer is worthy of his wages,” but some preachers are receiving wages without being worthy. They have charisma but no character. You’ve probably noticed the seemingly arrogant flaunting of riches by some clergymen today; it’s sad, but some seem to have put wealth above God.

This kind of attitude and behavior reduces the influence of all ministers. It brings reproach upon the name of Jesus. It causes hundreds of thousands to turn away in disgust from the church and its ministry. I fear such leaders will face an awful day of reckoning in the judgment. Preachers who are especially overpaid are likely to have widespread influence as well, and we all know there’s truth to the adage, “Power corrupts.”

What can Christians do to combat this problem? First of all, they can be very careful about who they support with their donations. Also, while avoiding judging others about their salvation, sometimes we need to speak out against a bad or corrupt situation.

Though the Christian church in general is not immune to overpaid preachers, I don’t believe any minister in God’s end-time remnant church is overpaid. All ministers receive virtually the same salary regardless of their job title or the size of their church. This eliminates a host of problems. In many cases, pastors’ spouses work in the public marketplace to supplement these pastors’ incomes.

Sadly, some people have pointed to overpaid preachers as an excuse to not return tithe. But we need to remember that the tithe is God’s; regardless of who is on the receiving end, the person who returns their tithe will be blessed by the Lord. In Jesus’ day, many of the priests were extremely corrupt, yet Jesus praised the woman who put two small coins into the temple treasury. Why? Because she gave her all in good faith; she was blessed for that.



Dear God, thank you that you are able to use my tithes to increase your work even in cases where the pastor is not deserving of support. Help me to focus my efforts on obeying you.



For Further Study: Mark 12:41–44



How can the Lord say, “I never knew you” when He knows everybody and everything?

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:22, 23).



In these verses, God is referring to knowing someone as a personal friend. We get to know Him as a friend when we talk with Him daily, read His words, follow Him gladly, and freely share with Him our joys and sorrows as with an earthly friend. Jesus also says, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14). If we truly love Jesus, we will keep His commandments.

The people being addressed in Matthew 7:22 have rejected His Holy Spirit. They have embraced a theology of salvation in sin or salvation by works—neither of which needs Jesus. They are self-made people who did not take time to become acquainted with Jesus, even though they appeared to be doing His work. Jesus doesn’t argue the fact that they performed many works in His name, maybe even miracles. It is possible to do good works and still lose out on salvation in the end. In this Scripture, He explains that He did not really get acquainted with them or know them as personal friends. These people were never converted and never placed their trust in His grace to save them.

Also, if we don’t know Jesus as a personal friend, if we are not working out of love for Him, our motives will be skewed. We could be doing works out of pride or envy, or possibly working from a belief or hope that we can earn our own salvation. Either pathway is wrong.

God wants us to have a special relationship of friendship, trust, and love. Then good works will flow naturally out of our intense love for our Redeemer and our desire to please Him.



Dear Jesus, help me to remember that spending time with you must be my top priority each day. I want to know you as a personal friend and trust in you alone to save me.





What part does “choice” play in a Christian’s life?



“If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

The freedom of choice is not only an important value to God, but it is a major key to success in our Christian walk. God wants everyone to be saved. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). Yet the Lord still permits everyone to have free choice. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

We find over and over in the Bible that God gave others the freedom to accept or reject Him. He permitted Satan to choose to rebel against Him. He also permitted Adam and Eve to choose disobedience. Cain and Abel were free to reject God’s sacrificial system, and Cain eventually turned from the Lord. The apostle Paul understood this innate freedom when he wrote: “I discipline my body ... lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Righteousness is never a locked-in, programmed provision that takes me to heaven no matter how I live, even if I do not want to go. Choice means I’m always free to change my mind. That’s why Jesus asks me to choose Him and to reaffirm my choice every single day.

It’s impossible to really love without freedom to choose. Love cannot be forced or it is not love.

If my daily choice is for Him, He will change me and make me like Him and, eventually, take me into His kingdom. But remember, I am free to turn and go another direction at any time. God will not force me. My daily choice to serve Him is very important. Jesus said, “whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).



*Dear Jesus, today I freely choose to love you
and accept you as my Lord and Savior.*



For Further Study: Matthew 11:28–30; Psalm 86:3; Revelation 3:5

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Is it legalistic to follow Christian rules of conduct?

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (3 John 1:11).



There is no legalism in doing what is right except when a person is doing it to curry favor for selfish reasons, instead of out of love for God. Of course, if they are trusting in their own deeds to save them, they are doomed to failure.

Salvation comes only as a miraculous, free gift from Jesus. The Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We're saved by "grace," which means undeserved favor. None of us deserve the exquisite gift God has given us "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). By putting our faith in Jesus, we are made right with God. He is the only one who can bridge the gap. Salvation by works (our conduct) is impossible.

But following Jesus' standards of conduct *because we have been saved and love Him* is never legalism. God asks us, "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed" (Isaiah 56:1). We do what is right to honor the One who bought our salvation with His own blood. We do it because He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). We obey out of love for our Savior.

Once we have been baptized into Christ, our lives should be very different. The apostle Paul puts it this way: "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" (Romans 6:6, 7). The blood of Jesus breaks our chains and sets us free—not free to do whatever we please, but free from the slavery of doing what is wrong. He empowers us to do what is right.



Dear Lord, thank you for breaking the bonds of sin and setting me free! Please give me the power to do those things that honor your name.





How can I adopt a Christian lifestyle without appearing judgmental or legalistic?



*“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me”
(Matthew 15:8).*

What makes a person pharisaical or legalistic is a lack of genuine love for God. Everything we do should be with one thought in mind: to express love and esteem for Jesus (1 John 3:22). When Christ is honored and reflected to others, they will be drawn to Him. Our question should always be, “Will this honor Jesus? Would I listen to this, sing this, do this, watch this, drink this, buy this, read this, say this, or go there if Jesus were here, in person, with me?”

Jesus is with us (Matthew 28:20), and His angels see everything we do. We must sense Jesus’ presence in every facet and activity of life. When we consciously spend time with Him, we become like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). Then when people are with us, they will respond as they did to the disciples of old: “They marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Christians who live like that will never become pharisaical, judgmental, or legalistic.

In Old Testament days, God’s people were in almost constant apostasy because they chose to live as their heathen neighbors rather than follow the distinctive lifestyle God outlined for them (Deuteronomy 31:16; Judges 2:17; 1 Chronicles 5:25). It is still true today. No one can serve two masters. Those who cling to the world’s lifestyle will be slowly molded by Satan to adopt his feelings and desires and, thus, be programmed to be lost. Those who follow Jesus’ principles will be changed into His image and will be prepared for heaven. There is no middle ground.

Jesus said, “He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38). Following the Lord requires sacrifice, but what we sacrifice is microscopic compared to what we gain. The God of the universe wants to adopt us as His children and to love us forever. He wants to give us *everything!*



*Dear God, help me to reflect your love so
that others may be drawn to Jesus.*



For Further Study: John 12:32; Matthew 6:24; 10:37, 38; Ezekiel 23:30



Should Christians fast?

“When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry” (Matthew 4:2).



First, let's consider why Jesus fasted. Was it some form of self-abasement or torture? No. Jesus' fasting enabled Him to sharpen His focus on the things of God and His mission to save the world. While it temporarily weakened Him physically, it actually strengthened and braced Him spiritually. When the devil came with his temptations, Jesus was ready to overcome.

There are many other biblical precedents for fasting. Queen Esther, for example, fasted without food or water for three days when her people were threatened with extermination (Esther 4:16). Instead of feasting as a typical queen would, she put aside her own physical needs to fast, praying for the deliverance of her people. God heard her prayers and delivered them.

But what about Christians living today? Should we fast? Jesus told His disciples that after He returned to heaven, there would be times when fasting would be appropriate. “The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days” (Luke 5:35). In addition, Jesus said there are some difficult challenges that can only be overcome when we pray and fast (Matthew 17:21).

While fasting is clearly taught in the New Testament, before doing so, you should carefully consider the state of your health. If you're in good health and are seeking guidance or a blessing, or have an urgent request for the Lord, fasting might be appropriate. There is no reason to believe that fasting for Christians is obsolete.

Remember also that fasting isn't always about abstaining from all food. It can mean abstinence from a variety of things. For example, some people do a “fruit fast” and eat only fruit for a time. Others refrain from eating sweets. If for some reason you can't complete a food fast, you could consider a TV or media fast (for some people, that might be more difficult than going without food!).

With the right attitude and humbleness of heart, fasting at proper times can be a form of worship and devotion to God, a way to seek His guidance and be drawn closer to Him.



Lord, please give me wisdom regarding the act of fasting. Help me to know when it is appropriate, and may my fasting always glorify you.





Can I really approach God directly even in my terrible sinful condition?



"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"
(Hebrews 4:16).

Once heard an old story about a young boy walking through a crowd toward a platform on which the President of the United States was seated. As the boy approached the stage, he moved toward a set of stairs that led directly to the Commander in Chief. Instantly, a security officer grabbed him by the collar and pulled him back. "And where do you think you're going, young man? You can't expect to just walk up to the president without permission!"

The trembling boy replied, "Oh yes I can. That man is my Daddy!"

It's kind of a cute story, even if it isn't true, but it sure brings home the point of Hebrews 4:16. Sometimes in our sinful condition, the devil whispers in our ears that we are not good enough to approach God. We're so unworthy that we should get cleaned up before coming to the Lord. But the Bible teaches that we have a loving heavenly Father. When we recognize our unworthiness and then discover how Christ loved us, even while we were still in sin, it helps us to know that we have a compassionate God who stretches out His arms to receive even the most rebellious of His children.

Since Jesus Christ lived in the flesh and was "tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15), we have a God who understands and who desires to be merciful to us. Hebrews 4:16 tells us we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." It is humbly acknowledging our sinfulness that opens the door to heaven.

We do not need an imperfect human mediator to stand in our place before God. The Bible says, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).



Dear Jesus, I am so grateful that I can come boldly to you, knowing it is your delight to encircle me in your arms of love.



For Further Study: John 14:5, 6; Romans 5:1, 2; 1 John 1:9

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



How could one man's death pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind?

"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).



A group of prisoners during World War II were put to work on an assignment under grueling conditions. The soldiers guarding them were brutal in their treatment; many of the captured were not even part of the enemy army.

One day the commander lined up the prisoners and stated that a shovel had been stolen and that the guilty party must step forward to be punished—which meant he would lose his life. After it was quiet for a moment, the commander shouted, "If someone doesn't step forward, I will kill all of you!"

At that moment a missionary quietly moved forward. The other prisoners gasped, because they knew this man had not stolen the shovel. They understood he was willing to give his life in order to save the rest of them. The missionary was indeed killed, and the men never forgot the sacrificial love of this innocent man.

In a small way, this story describes what happened when Christ stepped forward to give His life for a lost world. The pure, innocent Son of God willingly took the death sentence for all of us so that we, who rightfully deserve death, might be free. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned." Because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and all have sinned, something special was required for every person who has ever lived.

If Jesus was only a man, He could not have paid for the sins of the entire world; however, Jesus was all the fullness of God in a man's body (Colossians 2:9). Only one whose life is equal to all mankind could die for the sins of the human race. Because Jesus is the Creator and Author of all life, the life He laid down was more than equivalent to the lives of all people who would ever live. And since Christ rose from the dead, He is now able to administer the benefits of His gift of love to all who ask in faith.



O Lamb of God, my words are inadequate to express my love for you, who gave your life for me.





Does the Bible say it is wrong to gamble?



“A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him” (Proverbs 28:22).

In some ways, we take risks every day. Businessmen risk their livelihood on new products, for instance. But our subject today deals with something very different: the idea of placing a bet, or putting something of value at risk in order to win money or some other prize.

You won't find the word “gambling” in the Bible. So to answer this question, we need to look at biblical principles. In this regard, the Bible does make some strong statements indicating that “he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 28:20). Most people who gamble to gain wealth end up with empty wallets. Take a look at these facts about gambling:

- Two-thirds of Americans have participated in some form of gambling.
- Compulsive gamblers are the lifeblood of casinos.
- About two-thirds of problem gamblers resort to crime to gain money for gambling or debts.
- People visiting Las Vegas double their risk of suicide.

California has almost a million problem gamblers, costing taxpayers about \$1 billion annually due to the costs of criminal justice, unemployment, substance abuse, mental illness, and public assistance.

What about the lottery? This can be a temptation even for people who would never set foot in a casino. But, as with any form of gambling, the overwhelming majority loses money. The odds of making money through any form of gambling are very small. It's much better to save your money, wisely invest it, and to work. “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4).

Gambling is fueled by an overzealous desire for immediate wealth; people want to get rich quick. It's a natural desire, but that doesn't mean it's good. Greed is a trait that Christians should seek to eliminate from their lives; covetousness violates the tenth commandment. Remember, it was a love of silver that helped nail Jesus to the cross.

Finally, people who gamble are placing their faith in “remote chance”—a very unreliable companion. The only safe place to put your faith in is God. He will never let you down!



Dear heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the greatest and most satisfying treasure of all—Jesus.



For Further Study: Ecclesiastes 5:10; Luke 16:13; 1 Timothy 6:10



How do I start doing what God wants me to do when I don't really want to do it?

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).



Once we know what God wants us to do, we need to take action and do it. Remember, though, that no one can make themselves "ready" to serve God. Only God can do that. Pray that He makes you willing to obey, to be filled with His love, and for His Spirit to work in your life. Then choose to obey Him right away!

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21–23). Many feel they will be saved at Jesus' return, but they will, instead, be lost because they haven't obeyed God. They haven't known Jesus as their Friend or kept His commandments. They've only followed their feelings.

For the safety of our souls, we should never depend solely on feelings, because they are often deceiving. The devil can even influence our feelings. So if we depend on our feelings alone, he can more easily lead us to destruction. God would guide us through the unchanging words of Scripture. Our feelings, which can change on a whim, often lead us astray. Never listen to anything that contradicts the Holy Bible!

The Jewish leaders felt they should kill Jesus, but they were entirely wrong. They boasted about knowing the Scriptures, but they never took time to understand the only One who could save the human race. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). We need to build on that Rock!



Dear Lord, give me the solid foundation I need. Make me willing to do as you command in your Word. Empower me with your Spirit and fill me with your love today!





Will babies who die be saved in God's kingdom?



"Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"
(Matthew 18:3).

We don't have a specific answer to this question in the Bible, but some believe that infants will be saved based on a story that took place near the time of Christ's birth.

"Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more'" (Matthew 2:16–18).

It's a terribly sad story and shows the horrible lengths to which Satan went to destroy the Son of Man. Mothers who lost their babies sobbed because their children were "no more." But does this mean they will not see them in the resurrection?

The Old Testament foretold this tragic incident in Jeremiah 31:15. In speaking of the return of the exiles from Babylon, God spoke to mothers who lost children while being taken into captivity. The Israelite route passed through Ramah, and Matthew applies this reference to the mothers in Bethlehem who also cried for their children.

Notice what the next verse says: "Thus says the LORD: 'Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded . . . and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border'" (Jeremiah 31:16). Could this be fulfilled in a greater sense, like many of the Old Testament prophecies, when Jesus returns?

I personally believe it is a reference to the future resurrection. When I consider the tender regard Jesus had for children, it is easy to picture angels carrying infants, raised back to life at the resurrection, and placed into their mother's arms.



*Dear Lord, I trust my children into
your mighty and loving hands.*



For Further Study: Deuteronomy 1:39; Acts 2:38, 39



What does it mean that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”?

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15:50).



When seeking to understand a Scripture passage, it is wise to take in all that the Bible says about a topic. When God created Adam, without sin and in perfect condition, He did not make a ghost or spirit. Adam was formed from the “dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7). Adam later spoke of Eve as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). They were real people with real bodies. When God restores the earth, He will restore us with perfect bodies, not corrupt ones.

The apostle Paul assured us that we will someday have new bodies. God “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). And what kind of body did Jesus have after the resurrection? When Christ appeared to the disciples after He was raised from the dead, they were afraid He was a ghost. Notice His response: “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:39).

We can find a clearer understanding of Paul’s use of the word “flesh” in this passage by noticing how he uses it elsewhere in his letters. Note, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:8, 9). Being in the “flesh” simply meant a person “does not have the Spirit of Christ” (v. 9). Many times the Bible uses the word “fleshly” to denote the things of this world: “fleshly wisdom (2 Corinthians 1:12), “fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:8), “fleshly lusts” (1 Peter 2:11).

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that being converted is to be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5, 6). And so, the Bible is simply saying in 1 Corinthians 15:50 that no one can enter God’s kingdom unless conversion first takes place and flesh becomes spirit.



Dear Lord, thank you for promising me a new body and perfect health when all things are made new.



For Further Study: Matthew 16:17; Galatians 1:16

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Is John 20:19 a record of the disciples instituting Sunday-keeping?



“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ ” (John 20:19).

The disciples did not believe the resurrection had taken place. That was the reason Christ appeared to them in John 20:19! They met with the doors bolted shut “for fear of the Jews,” not to worship. Jesus showed up to rebuke them. “He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mark 16:14).

We also need to keep in mind that the Romans and the Jews reckoned the beginning and ending of days differently. The Romans counted the beginning of a new day at midnight, which has carried over into many cultures today. But the Jews said a day began at sunset. The account of creation brings this out when we repeatedly read, “So the *evening* and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5, my emphasis). This means the passage for today could actually be interpreted as a Sunday night meeting, which would be, for the Jews, the day of Monday.

There is no implication that they counted Sunday as a holy day. Only eight texts in the New Testament mention the first day of the week; none of them imply that it is holy. Jesus most definitely rose from the dead on Sunday, but He never commanded us to worship in honor of His resurrection. The way we honor the resurrection is the same way we honor His death—through baptism. Being buried with Christ in the waters of baptism symbolizes accepting His death on the cross. In the same way, as we are raised from the waters of baptism, we are raised with Christ into a new way of life. The power of Jesus’ resurrection is the power we live by every single day of the week, not just Sunday.



*Dear Jesus, in honor of your resurrection, I give you
my life. Raise me up to walk in newness of life!*



For Further Study: Luke 23:56; Romans 6:1–6



How can we know that the struggles and sacrifices in this life are really worth it?

“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 1:12).



The Bible is filled with encouraging words to help us persevere and not lose heart. People in Bible times got discouraged and needed a boost in their walk with God. The apostle Paul was constantly challenged for his faith and could write to the church in Rome: “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3, 4).

The apostle Peter wrote to Christians who were suffering persecution. He was not unaware of the problems his friends faced. He later was martyred himself. But in the face of these trials, he stated, “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” (1 Peter 5:8–10).

Paul cheered the church in Galatia to move forward through its difficulties. He wrote: “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9). Jesus said, “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

One of Paul’s strongest statements on whether the reward is worth the sacrifice goes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Just one glimpse of that eternal kingdom will cause the worst trials and persecutions of Earth to pale into insignificance, and the redeemed will cry out: “Hallelujah, heaven is cheap enough!”



*Dear Lord, no matter how I feel today,
I choose to hang on to you.*





Is heaven a misty place with souls who only play harps and float on clouds?



“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

We cannot even begin to imagine the wonders and beauties of our future heavenly home. The apostle Paul could not find words to describe how special it will be. So where do distorted pictures of heaven come from?

This false teaching originated with the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44). He is anxious to twist God's loving plan and present heaven as an unreal, “spooky” place so people will lose interest or become skeptical of God's Word altogether. Satan knows that when people fully understand the Bible truth regarding the home of the saved, his power over them is broken, because they will begin making plans to enter that kingdom.

Will we be ghosts floating around in heaven? Not according to Jesus. After His resurrection, Christ proved to His disciples that He was flesh and bone by having them touch Him and by eating food. This very same Jesus ascended to His Father and will come again to Earth. The righteous will be given bodies just like the body of Christ and will be real people with flesh and bones throughout eternity. Our heavenly body will not be subject to death or decay.

The teaching that the saved in heaven will be ghosts who float on clouds and do nothing but play harps has no foundation in the Scriptures. Jesus did not die on the cross to provide any such trivial future. Most people have no interest in such an ethereal existence and, therefore, have little or no desire to enter God's heavenly kingdom—often preferring it only because they fear hell. If only all people everywhere could learn the truth about God's holy city and new earth, millions would begin to understand His love and would turn to Him with all their hearts. A person who misses out on God's kingdom has made the supreme blunder.



Dear heavenly Father, thank you for Bible promises that describe heaven as a real and glorious place.



For Further Study: Isaiah 65:21, 22; John 14:1–3

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What are the greatest dangers for Christians today?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).



Obviously, there are many things in our world that threaten our relationship with God. Sometimes people fall rapidly from grace. At other times, moving away from truth happens in a subtle manner. One constant temptation for some—and among the greatest of dangers—is divided loyalties.

Many Christians have two loves that divide their hearts: love for Jesus, and love for the world and its sinful practices. Trying to satisfy both sides won't work. Jesus warned, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). We must choose one side.

God's Word says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). It is impossible to love the things that we know are wrong and still give our hearts to Jesus.

Still, too many people want to see how closely they can follow the world and still be considered Christians. They want the benefits of Christianity, but they also desire to conform to the world; they want to fit in and participate in its pleasures. People in this situation aren't being honest with themselves or with God. They are attempting to walk a narrow thread that doesn't exist.

In contrast, God tells us that we should “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” (Romans 12:2). He wants us to be changed and conformed to the image of Christ, not the world. The Bible says, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). The Lord wants us to become like Jesus so we can be trusted in heaven.



Dear God, help me to turn away from and hate the sinful desires of the world. Guide my thoughts, desires, and heart so that I will be transformed to be like Jesus.





Does 2 Corinthians 3:7, 8, teach the Ten Commandments passed away?



*“If the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?”
(2 Corinthians 3:7, 8).*

The Bible is clear that God’s Ten Commandments stand forever. King David stated, “The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness” (Psalm 111:7, 8). The apostle Paul affirmed, “Do we make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

So what “passed away”? This passage is speaking of the glory of the countenance on Moses’ face after he had been with the Lord. Being in the divine presence of God caused his face to shine so much that, at times, he wore a veil to cover this brightness. This glow was temporary and would fade. The fact that it passed away did not mean it was fake or bad.

Paul uses this glory on Moses’ face as an illustration of the Jewish system that God established through Moses to point people to Christ. It was not a bad system. But when Jesus came, this system passed away. The ultimate purpose of the sanctuary, the feasts, and all the ceremonial laws was to direct people to the Messiah. It was glorious in its purpose, but it was not the aim to keep people tied to rituals. God’s desire is that His law would be written into the hearts of people.

The passage says the ministry of the Spirit would be “more glorious.” When you read the whole passage (2 Corinthians 3:3–9), you will see that the subject is not doing away with God’s law, but the location of the law from “tables of stone” to the “tables of the heart.” Under Moses’ leadership, the law was given on stone. But under the work of the Holy Spirit, it will be written on the heart.



Father in heaven, through the work of the Holy Spirit, please write your law on my heart.



For Further Study: Exodus 34:25–39; Romans 8:3, 4

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



If people danced in the Bible, why is it wrong to dance today?

*“Now as the ark of the LORD came into the City of David, Michal, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD”
(2 Samuel 6:16).*



It’s true that not all dancing is evil. David leaped and danced before the Lord as an expression of praise for His blessings (2 Samuel 6:14–16). Also, notice that he was dancing by himself. David’s dance was similar to that of the lame man who leaped for joy after being healed by Jesus (Acts 3:8–10). Such dancing, or leaping, is recommended by Jesus to those who are being persecuted (Luke 6:22, 23).

Suggestive dancing with those of the opposite sex and lewd dancing (such as by strippers) are the kinds of dancing condemned by the Bible. This kind of dancing inevitably leads one away from Jesus and spirituality.

There are examples in the Bible of improper dancing. When the Israelites danced around the golden calf, they forgot about God and broke His commandments. Moses had been up on the mountain, receiving the Ten Commandments. But when he came down, he could tell something wasn’t right. “As soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses’ anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain” (Exodus 32:19).

In another instance, “when Herod’s birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask” (Matthew 14:6, 7). The sensuous dance of the young woman caused the admiring King Herod to make a rash and foolish decision, and it caused the death of John the Baptist.

Notice these shocking statistics: A priest in New York said that three-fourths of the girls who have confessed adultery to him put the blame on dancing. Other priests have said that three-fourths is too low; they estimate nine-tenths. Remember, if Christ can participate in an activity with us, we are safe. If not, it’s something to stay away from.



Dear Jesus, help us always to avoid any type of dancing that would lead us away from you.





Doesn't the Bible say the law is faulty?



"Because finding fault with them, He says: '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'"
(Hebrews 8:8).

Imagine that you ask a neighborhood boy to cut your entire lawn while you are on vacation. He agrees and you say, "I'll pay you when I return." Later, when you drive up to your home, you notice the front lawn looks nicely mowed. But when you step into the backyard, it looks like an overgrown hayfield! When the boy comes over to be paid, you point out the backyard. His guilty look tells you he knew better, but you pay him half the agreed amount and send him away.

Now picture that you are going on vacation a year later. You call up this same boy to mow your lawn. When he comes over, you make *another* agreement, emphasizing that he is to cut the whole lawn. He agrees, and this time does the complete job. Looking at these two scenarios, would you conclude that the first agreement was faulty? No. The boy didn't carry out his end of the bargain. The problem wasn't with your agreement, but with the boy.

God's original covenant with Israel was good. Even though the word "new" is used regarding a second covenant, it doesn't mean the first one had a problem. The issue was not with God's covenant or law; the problem was with the people. They eventually turned to idols and forsook the Lord.

Hebrews says that the people were faulty, not the covenant. Paul explains this when he writes, "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3, 4). The law is perfect. The problem is with faulty people who choose to walk in the flesh instead of in the Spirit.



Lord, I invite your Spirit to live in my heart, that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in me.



For Further Study: Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 4:2



Did Jesus make full atonement for all my sins—or must I do more?

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).



Christ did not make a partial payment for our sins when He died on the cross of Calvary. Jesus paid the full penalty for our transgressions. His gift was not just for a few good people, but for all. Those who accept Him in faith owe no works of penance for cleansing, but are already considered “washed” in the blood of the Lamb!

The teaching that we must perform penance implies there is a work we can do to help pay for our sins and thus earn our salvation. This belief is contrary to the Bible, which clearly states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). A gift is not a gift if we make any payment for it.

I love how the prophet Isaiah describes this beautiful promise of forgiveness: “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25). This is more than a legal transaction. It’s not just a matter of hitting the “delete” button on some heavenly computer! It’s a promise of transforming power that will change our lives.

If we compare God to how most sinful people function, we might think the Lord would not forget our sins and that He would want to “make us pay” for breaking the law. But God is not like us. He is so much more. See how Micah describes the attitude of our Redeemer toward His people: “Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18, 19).



Dear Lord, I choose to receive your full and free gift of forgiveness. Let your grace transform my life today.





Should we only support the innocent party in a married couple getting a divorce?



“The LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ ”
(1 Samuel 16:7).

Too often when a couple has marital problems, others “take sides.” It’s easy to hear one side of a story but not know the other side. While it is true that there are cases in which one party has clearly broken a marital vow or has an out-of-control addiction that is destroying others, we should not overlook that a marriage is made up of two imperfect people.

I like to encourage concerned friends and families to focus less on “whose fault” caused the broken marriage and think more of how we can encourage healing and reconciliation. Instead of telling one party, “I’m praying for you,” say, “I’m praying for you *both*.” Humility should be the trademark of all Christians in how we deal with others, whether spouses, children, or fellow church members. The apostle Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3).

The statistics are sobering about second marriages. Many “innocent” people in a divorce have not faced their own issues and turn around and marry another person who fits into their unhealthy way of functioning without even realizing it. When a person who suffers from divorce spends more time pointing a finger at the guilty party and does not realize they have issues in their own life, little progress will be made.

Sometimes the “innocent party,” by lovelessness, inattentiveness, self-righteousness, unkindness, selfishness, nagging, and downright coldness, can encourage evil thoughts and actions in his or her spouse. Sometimes the “innocent party” might be equally as guilty before God as the “guilty” one. We are quick to make judgments about what seems “obvious” in others, but not see the bigger picture. We can thank God that He looks more deeply at our motives and judges accordingly.



*Dear Lord, may I be slow to judge others
and be quick to show love and humility.*



For Further Study: Matthew 7:1–5; John 7:24; Ephesians 4:29

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Are sinners going to be eternally tormented?

“He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever”
(Revelation 14:10, 11).



The word translated here as “forever” does not always mean “without end.” The New King James Bible uses this term 400 times, often in connection with things that have *already ended*. (The King James divides the word with a space—“for ever.”)

For instance, in Exodus 21:1–6, a Hebrew servant could choose to serve his master “forever,” but it obviously means only as long as he lived. Hannah took her son Samuel to God’s tabernacle to remain and serve Him there “forever” (1 Samuel 1:22), but she plainly defined that time by saying “as long as he lives” (verse 28).

The term “forever” is clearly defined in Psalm 48:14: “For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death.” Jonah was said to be in the great fish “forever” (Jonah 2:6), yet we know it was only for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). Christ is also called “a priest forever” in Hebrews 5:6; yet after sin is blotted out, Christ’s work as a priest will end.

According to these examples, the wicked will suffer as long as they continue to live in the fire. Then, “When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever” (Psalm 92:7). And, “May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more” (Psalm 104:35).

One of the clearest statements in Scripture on what happens to the wicked is found in Malachi. “‘The day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘That will leave them neither root nor branch’” (Malachi 4:1). The prophet goes on to say they will be “ashes under the soles of your feet.” The final results of sin, eternal destruction, will last forever.



Lord, when all sin is destroyed, may I not be found clinging to anything that will be destroyed. May my hand clasp only your hand that I may live forever.





Isn't the great tribulation yet to come?



"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, everyone who is found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1).

Yes. It is to take place just before Jesus returns. The "great tribulation" corresponds with the time of the seven last plagues mentioned in Revelation 16. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" (Revelation 15:1). God's wrath will be directed against those who disobey His law, distort His truth, and oppress His people. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

The great tribulation also coincides with the battle of Armageddon. Both take place immediately before Christ's second coming. "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'" (Revelation 16:16, 17).

I believe the great time of trouble will last only a month or two. Here are a few Scriptures that show it will be a short period of time: Revelation 18:8 tells us, "Her plagues will come in one day." A "day" in Bible prophecy represents one literal year (Ezekiel 4:6, Numbers 14:34, Luke 13:32). So when Revelation says that "her plagues come in one day," it means within, or less than, one year's time.

The very nature of the seven last plagues—the rivers and seas turning to blood and the planet being scorched with great heat—would render it impossible for the human race to survive more than a month or two. This is why Jesus said, "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).



Dear Lord, thank you for your promise that I am safe in your hands during all times of trouble.



For Further Study: Psalm 91:10; Romans 8:18; John 16:33



Is salvation really free?

"Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).



I imagine that it's your son's birthday. You've gone out and purchased him a gift, wrapped it up, and you hand it to him. He's excited as he rips off the wrapping paper and holds the present. He beams as he stares at it. Then he throws his arms around you and says, "Thanks! How much do I owe you?"

Of course, you say, "It's a gift. You don't owe me anything!"

Now picture yourself coming home from work and walking into the house. As you step into your bedroom to change, you notice an envelope on your dresser with your name on it. You tear it open and find money from your son's piggy bank with a little note that says, "Here's to pay for the present you gave me." You'd probably roll your eyes and think, *He doesn't get it. This is a gift. You're not supposed to pay anything for a gift!*

I know this story is a little far-fetched, but it illustrates Isaiah 55:1. The gifts of God are free. You receive them "without money and without price." There is nothing you can do to help God save you. Does salvation come with a price tag? Oh yes, but the amount is so large you could never purchase it. Only Jesus' life could pay for your sins and set you free. He gives you this gift as an act of grace that you may choose to receive by faith.

However, some people wrongly conclude that, because salvation is a free gift, they can ignore the law and abuse the privileges of grace. Not so. "Do we make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). When by faith we humbly repent of our sins and receive the gift of salvation, our response of love and obedience doesn't earn us eternal life, but demonstrates we have received the gift.



Dear Jesus, by faith I confess my sins to you and with thanks receive your free gift of salvation.





Doesn't 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2, speak of Sunday church offerings?



"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2).

In this passage, the apostle Paul was writing to churches in Asia Minor to help their famine-stricken brethren in Christ. The people of Judea were struggling to have enough food, and the apostle encouraged the new Christians to remember those back in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26). After Agabus prophesied about this great famine, the disciples "determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29, 30).

Since all references in the New Testament demonstrate that these Christians kept the seventh-day Sabbath, Paul made a practical suggestion on this special offering. He suggested that on Sunday morning (which was the time they paid bills and settled accounts), after the Sabbath was over, they put aside something for their needy brethren so it would be on hand when he came. Jewish people did not deal with money on the Sabbath.

The Greek words for "lay something aside" literally mean "by himself." In today's language, we would say "at home." Sometimes this is translated "save it up" or "set money aside" or "put it in a special place." There is no reference here to gathering for worship on Sunday or taking up offerings at a church service. This was a simple way for people to put aside some extra funds "as he may prosper" to help the suffering Christians in Judea.

No sacredness is connected to the first day of setting aside these funds. It was Paul's way to help these poor Christians practically remember other members of the household of faith. People who systematically set aside funds usually give more than those who sporadically try to give much at once.



Dear heavenly Father, I choose to systematically set aside funds to spread the gospel around the world. Thank you for prospering me to be able to do this.



For Further Study: Luke 4:16; Acts 13:13, 14; 16:13; 17:2



How do Christians deal with meddlesome parents and in-laws without dishonoring them?

*“Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you”
(1 Thessalonians 4:11).*



As soon as a couple says, “I do,” on their wedding day, they gain more than a new spouse. Their marriage increases their family to include in-laws. Having a new set of parents can be a wonderful experience, and many people develop close ties to their in-laws. Consider the close bond between Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:6). Yet it is also a transition that can be fraught with conflict and turmoil.

All parents feel some reluctance to let their children go. But if the apron strings are not cut, the new bond between spouses can be damaged. There is a sacred circle that should be around every home, and parents should not tamper with the union that exists exclusively between husband and wife. Parents should respect these boundaries and not tread where they are not invited.

Your goal as parents was to raise an adult, not keep your son or daughter in a state of being a dependent child. Here are a few suggestions: Pray for the spouses of your children, accept who they are, and only give advice when asked. Don’t put your expectations on them, and allow them to make mistakes. Remember that you didn’t raise a perfect child either.

But the married couple can also help in these situations by being patient. First, remember that your in-laws are not your parents, and don’t put unrealistic expectations on them. Seek to understand their perspectives, and don’t try to change them. Set healthy boundaries and have your spouse help out. The Bible says, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18).

There is a separation between parents and children that God ordained in the beginning. Jesus repeated this guide, as did the apostle Paul: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). It would be well for parents and in-laws to respect God’s counsel.



*Dear Lord, thank you for my parents and in-laws.
Help me to live peaceably with them and in honor.*





How old should one be to qualify for baptism?



"He who believes and is baptized will be saved"
(Mark 16:16).

Children should be old enough to understand the meaning of conversion and baptism. Of course, that age will vary from child to child. But let me emphasize that preparation for baptism is more than theoretically having knowledge of certain Bible teachings. People, whatever their age, should have a genuine conversion experience.

To those who heard the apostle Peter preach on the day of Pentecost and were "cut to the heart," he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your *children*, and . . . as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:37–39, my emphasis). Children are capable of having a true religious experience with Jesus.

The Bible records instances in which entire families were baptized. I assume that includes some children who heard and responded to the gospel with their parents. Of the Philippian jailer, it says, "[Paul and Silas] spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Acts 16:32, 33).

Children need to make an intelligent decision to surrender to Christ and follow Him. Many are ready for baptism at 10 or 11 years of age, some at 8 or 9. And some are not ready at 12 or 13. No age level is specified in the Bible, because children have different levels of experience and understanding. Some are ready earlier than others. It can be helpful to have young candidates write out a page or so on the topic, "Why I feel ready to be baptized."

You might wonder if a person should be old enough so that they will not slip and fall in their Christian experience. But adults slip and fall after baptism. A new Christian at whatever age is a "babe" in Christ. Everyone needs to be "born again" (John 3:3).



*Dear Jesus, thank you for the gift of baptism
and for calling children to come to you.*



For Further Study: Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 8:12



Does God forbid reconciliation if one spouse ran off with another person but later wants to return home?

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans’ ” (Hosea 3:1).



One of the most amazing stories in all of Scripture is about a prophet named Hosea who married a woman of ill repute. She was unfaithful to her marriage vow many times, and God asked Hosea to take her back. I’m not suggesting that God commands every married person to take back a repentant spouse who has been unfaithful. Jesus clearly taught us that divorce was permissible when a partner has broken the marriage vow through adultery. Yet Hosea’s story does show us the incredible love and forgiveness that God extends to us.

There is no hard rule in the Bible that states you should never take back a repentant spouse who has been unfaithful. If such a spouse is deeply repentant and exhibits a changed life over a period of time, the other spouse, through much prayer and wise counsel, might consider coming back together with their unfaithful partner. There will be deep wounds to heal. Strong boundaries will need to be set in place. The offending partner should be understanding of the pain and distrust in their spouse.

A problem that can fester in the heart of any wounded person is bitterness. Whether a spouse takes back their unfaithful partner or not, God calls us to forgive others. Jesus said, “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14, 15). Forgiveness doesn’t mean you forget what happened or shove it under the carpet. But it does mean to let go of the desire to pay the other person back.

I have personally seen the power of forgiveness bring healing to marriages broken by unfaithfulness. It’s not an easy road to walk, but neither is a life of bitterness.



Lord, help me to never hold onto bitterness toward anyone, but be willing to forgive.



For Further Study: Ephesians 4:30–32; James 5:16

Scan for more on this topic. ▶



Were people of the Old Testament saved by the law?



“[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

No person has ever been saved by attempting to keep the law. In our own power, it is impossible and always has been from Adam all the way up to our time. All who have been saved in all ages have been saved by grace. As 2 Timothy 1:9 points out, this grace didn’t begin at the cross but was established “before time began.” The first gospel presentation was given after Adam and Eve sinned. The Lord said to the serpent, “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” (Genesis 3:15).

The law has many purposes. It is the basis of God’s covenant (Exodus 20); it is our standard of judgment (Psalm 119:172); and it points out sin. The apostle James colorfully illustrates how the law is like a mirror that reveals sin in our lives (James 1:23–25). The law does not remove sin. Only Christ can save us from sin. The apostle Paul writes, “By deeds of the law *no flesh* will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20, my emphasis). This means every human being who has ever lived cannot be justified by trying to keep the law. Once you sin, it’s just too late.

Some believe Jesus introduced grace on Earth. It is true that Christ provided the means of grace through His sacrifice, but such grace was extended to all mankind. Those before the cross looked forward to Jesus’ atonement; those after the cross look back on it. Many in the Old Testament understood and received God’s grace. Noah “found grace” (Genesis 6:8); Moses found grace (Exodus 33:17); the Israelites found grace (Jeremiah 31:2); and Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many other Old Testament characters were saved “by faith” according to Hebrews 11.



Dear Jesus, thank you for extending your grace to my life. I receive its transforming power into my heart.



For Further Study: Acts 4:10, 12; Ephesians 1:4–6



Didn't the disciples keep Sunday as a holy day?

*"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight"
(Acts 20:7).*



According to the Bible, each day begins at sundown and ends at the next sundown (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; Leviticus 23:32) and the dark part of the day comes first. So Sabbath begins Friday night at sundown and ends Saturday night at sundown. This meeting of Acts 20 was held on the dark part of Sunday, or on what we now call Saturday night. The New English Bible translation actually says: "On the Saturday night in our assembly . . ."

This special gathering was a Saturday-night meeting that lasted until midnight. Paul was on a farewell tour and knew he would not see these people again (verse 25). No wonder he preached so long! (No regular weekly service would have lasted all night.) Paul was "ready to depart the next day." If this next day was sacred, would Paul spend the whole day traveling instead of worshipping? The Bible repeatedly tells us Paul worshiped on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42–44; 17:2; 16:12, 13).

The "breaking of bread" has no "holy day" significance whatsoever, because they broke bread daily (Acts 2:46). Jesus broke bread with the disciples on Thursday night before He was crucified (Luke 22:19). There is not the slightest indication in this Scripture passage that the first day is holy, nor that these early Christians considered it so. Nor is there evidence that the Sabbath had been changed. In Ezekiel 46:1, God refers to Sunday as one of the six "working days."

This meeting is probably mentioned in Scripture because of the miracle of raising Eutychus back to life after he fell to his death from a third-floor window. The young man, whose name means "fortunate," fell asleep while Paul preached late into the night. The fall killed him, but the apostle rushed down stairs and took him up in his arms and the man was miraculously brought back to life.



*Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of the Sabbath,
a day established by your word and for eternity.*





Shouldn't we be baptized in Jesus' name only?



"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Some believe that all baptisms must be performed only "in the name of Jesus Christ." The concept is based on "non-Trinitarian theology," which basically teaches that since there is only "one" God, there can't be three distinct persons in the godhead, but only One with three different modes. These "oneness" churches believe "Jesus" is the correct and complete name for "God."

It's rather difficult for me to hold to this idea based on so many Bible passages that do not support this teaching. Jesus' own words in the great commission clearly teach that we baptize in the "name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," which they argue is a corruption of the original text. Even at Christ's own baptism, we see a manifestation of the godhead when the Father speaks and the Spirit descends like a dove (Matthew 3:16, 17).

The references in the book of Acts to people being baptized in Jesus' name speak more about being baptized under the authority of Jesus. They don't really define a formula for what should be said when a person is baptized. Choosing select passages, such as Acts 19:5, and denying other Scriptures that uphold the Trinity creates this problem. What shall we do with: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one"? (1 John 5:7).

Many New Testament converts already believed in God. The critical question was their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, of whom John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). The Christian who accepts Jesus automatically believes in the Father and the Spirit, whom Christ repeatedly spoke about.



Dear Father in heaven, I believe in Jesus as my Savior and invite the Holy Spirit to work in my life.



For Further Study: John 10:30; 14:13; 1 Peter 1:2



Does God expect us to live with a physically abusive spouse?

“Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” (Ephesians 5:28, 29).



It is very sad that violence occurs in so many Christian homes. Statistically, it is almost always the husband abusing the wife, but it can happen the other way around as well. And there are many different ways family violence happens beyond physical abuse—psychological, emotional, sexual, and verbal. Physical abuse often happens in combination with other types of abuse. When we violate another person by hitting, kicking, slapping, punching, beating, or other forms of mistreatment, we devalue them as human beings created in God’s image.

Sometimes Ephesians 5:22 is quoted to push wives to stay in an abusive relationship: “Wives, submit to your own husbands.” The part that gets left off is “as to the Lord.” So also this passage is looked over: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (v. 25). It is in violation of Christian principles for a husband to demand his wife submit to his physical assaults to her or the children.

Unfortunately, there are times when a marriage deteriorates to a point where physical abuse calls for a separation. Physical harm can be life threatening and is a serious problem that demands immediate attention. The spouse and family members who have been physically abused must find a safe environment in which to live. Both husband and wife need to seek professional help through a qualified Christian marriage counselor. The goal is healing reconciliation, but that might not be reached in some of these cases.

It is in harmony with Christian principles for a spouse to seek a safe place and not live under physical abuse. Churches should be seen as havens of refuge and not be quick to question a person, typically a woman, who is struggling to be faithful in the marriage but is living under such cruelty. Some communities provide domestic violence shelters that give space and time for healing.

Let us help those who are suffering from abuse and not ignore the problem.



Dear Lord, may I always treat others with dignity, kindness, and respect.





Isn't the Sabbath for the Jews only?



"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Long before there was ever a Jew on this earth, God created the Sabbath. When people read the story of Creation, it is easy to assume that since Genesis was written by Moses and is part of the Old Testament, then our first parents must have been Jews. Yet the Hebrew nation did not even exist for another 2,500 years! The father of the Jewish nation was Abraham. Like the marriage institution, also established in Eden, the Sabbath was to be a blessing for *all* people.

The Decalogue is eternal and not bound to some particular race or people group. Though God succinctly presented His commandments most clearly through Moses, the ten laws are not limited to the Jews. They were given to the entire human race. The concept of a Jewish Sabbath makes about as much sense as saying there is a German law of gravity or a Chinese law of thermodynamics.

In Mark 2:27, we read how Jesus emphasized that the Sabbath was made for all human beings. It does not say, "The Sabbath was made for Jews." We would be ridiculed in suggesting that the fifth commandment, to honor our parents, was only for people in New Zealand or that the eighth commandment, to not steal, applies only to Russians!

Some suggest that the Sabbath *principle* is to keep one day a week as a rest day. They believe any day will work and that we are not bound to the "seventh" day, which is supposedly of Jewish origin. But that line of thought falls short as well, since the creation account is repeatedly specific: "On the *seventh* day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the *seventh* day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the *seventh* day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:2, 3, my emphasis). The fourth commandment even connects itself to the creation (Exodus 20:11).



*Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of the Sabbath.
May I find it a privilege to rest from my work
in order to remember your work for me.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 66:23; Matthew 12:8

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Should Christians be involved in Halloween?

“When they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19, 20).



It is believed that Halloween began as a pagan Celtic holiday. Many practices involved in this celebration were fed by superstition. The Celts believed the souls of the dead roamed the villages at night. Since not all the spirits were friendly, gifts and treats were left out to pacify the evil and to insure the next year's crop. They also dressed in costumes to confuse vengeful spirits. This practice eventually evolved into today's trick-or-treating.

Halloween is obviously not a holiday that Christians should celebrate. So what should Christians do at Halloween? Here are some guidelines:

Follow the Bible. Teach your children clearly that the Bible does not support worshiping or honoring dead people. The Bible is clear that the dead are truly dead.

Share your faith. Instead of candy, share something appropriate to guide children toward Jesus and the Bible. “It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14).

Draw clear boundaries. Some activities at Halloween are obviously things a Christian will not participate in: watching horror movies, eating lots of junk food, playing pranks that hurt people, telling scary stories, or visiting so-called haunted attractions.

Refrain from a judgmental spirit. Perhaps your fellow Christians are not as clear or convicted as you are about how to deal with Halloween. Hurtful criticism will not help them. Instead of condemning parents, why not invite a few families into your home for a short Bible study, refreshments, and family-building games? Make it a time of worship and fellowship with the emphasis that, as Christians, the only thing we “hallow” is the name of our heavenly Father—to whom Jesus taught us when we pray to say, “Hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9).



Lord, give us the wisdom to turn something meant for evil into something to point others to the truth about life, death, and you.





What does the Bible say about modesty?



“Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

The problem of immodesty is always a two-way street. First, we live in an immoral society in which the prevalence of impurity, loose sexual conduct, and lack of boundaries is rampant. Insecure men often look for love in all the wrong places, and guys in bondage to pornography are led by their hormones to relate to women as objects to use, not as someone to respect and protect.

And it's not just guys who are being too aggressive. There seems to be fewer ladies who conduct themselves in modest and refined ways around young men. In the brokenness of our society, more and more children grow up with a giant hole in their heart. This hunger for love short-circuits their thinking, and they are led to grasp after feeling valued by others through destructive behaviors.

Let's consider the other side of the coin for a moment. Young women can carry themselves in such a way that can tempt young men to be too forward. A suggestive smile, revealing clothing, off-color comments or jokes, and even a “too relaxed” attitude can awaken temptation in a man. There is something about Christian reserve and dignity that helps remind a man to keep himself pure.

I encourage both young men and women to set healthy boundaries in their relationships with the opposite sex. Perhaps there are men you should never hang around. Learning to clearly say ‘no’ begins with a determination to follow the Bible's counsel to “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14). When you decide to go somewhere secluded with a person of the opposite sex telling yourself, “I'm not going to do anything wrong,” you are only setting up yourself for failure.

Nurture purity in your conduct. Don't live in such a way that you feed the lust in your own heart or in the hearts of those around you. Carry yourself in a way that fulfills Jesus' counsel to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Is your life pointing others to Christ?



Dear Lord, I commit my life to purity. Help my conduct to reflect a godly life.



For Further Study: Matthew 5:28; Philippians 4:8; James 1:14, 15

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the New Testament replace the Ten Commandments with a new law of love?

“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).



Some believe that God's Ten Commandments passed away at the cross. They quote Romans 13:10 to emphasize that He replaced the Decalogue with a new law—love. They say what God *really* wants from us is to love Him and others. But it's a redundant argument since the whole point of the Ten Commandments is to love God and love others.

Another text used to support this view is from a discussion Jesus had with a lawyer. The man asked which commandment was the greatest. Jesus said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Christ did not replace the law by His statement, but revealed its deeper meaning. Just as your ten fingers are attached to your hands, God's commandments are all connected to the one great law of love. The essence of the first four commandments is to love God, and the spirit of the last six concerns how to love others.

Love fulfills the law by taking away the drudgery and making law-keeping a delight (Psalm 40:8). When we truly love a person, honoring his or her requests becomes a joy. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). It is impossible to love the Lord and not keep His laws. The Bible says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

To those who want to turn away from God's commandments, the Bible also says, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). Those are strong words for people who want to abolish God's eternal law.



Dear Lord, may I obey your law out of a heart filled with gratitude and love for you.



For Further Study: Mark 12:29–34; Romans 13:9
Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Why didn't God destroy the devil when he sinned and, thus, end the sin problem?



"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty' (Exodus 34:6, 7).

When sin first entered into the universe, it was something completely new, and it's likely the inhabitants did not fully understand it. Lucifer was a brilliant, highly respected angelic leader. His approach was one of great concern for heaven and the angels.

He probably said something like this: "Heaven is good, but it would be improved with more angel input. Too much unchallenged authority, as the Father and Son have, tends to blind leaders to real life. Angels should not be required to take orders. We should give the orders. God knows my suggestions are correct, and He is feeling threatened. Others will listen if we move in unison. We must not be weak; we must act."

Lucifer's arguments convinced many angels, and one-third joined him. If God had destroyed Lucifer immediately, some angelic beings who did not fully understand God's character might have begun to worship God through fear, saying, "Lucifer might have been correct. Be careful. If you differ with God, He might kill you." So nothing would have been settled. Instead, the problem would have been heightened.

The only service acceptable to God is voluntary service prompted by love. Obedience for any other reason is dangerous, futile, and doomed to fail. Satan claimed he had a better plan for the government of the universe. God gave him time to demonstrate its principles. The Lord will abolish sin only after every soul in the universe is fully convinced that Satan's government is unfair, hateful, ruthless, lying, and destructive.

The Bible says, "We are made a [theater] unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9). The entire universe is watching as we each play a part in the controversy between Christ and Satan. As the controversy ends, every soul will fully understand the principles of both kingdoms and will have chosen to follow either Christ or Satan.



Dear Lord, I turn from sin and come to you as my only ally and friend.



For Further Study: 2 Corinthians 5:19; Nahum 1:9



If Jesus is coming “as a thief in the night,” how can anyone know anything about it?

*“The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night”
(1 Thessalonians 5:2).*



This question illustrates the importance of reading an entire passage and not just a select part. First of all, the apostle Paul says, “Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you” (1 Thessalonians 5:1). Paul is telling the believers in Thessalonica that they know about Jesus’ soon coming. They are aware that it will be like a thief in the night, but *not* for themselves (v. 2).

“For when *they* say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon *them*, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And *they* shall not escape” (v. 3, my emphasis). It is not the believer who experiences the coming of Christ as an unexpected robber, but those who live in denial of the second advent. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (v. 4). Only those who are unprepared experience the second coming of Christ as a thief. Paul goes on to explain, “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (vv. 5, 6).

Many interpret this text to mean that Jesus will come like a silent thief to steal believers out of this world. Then cars will collide, planes will crash, sacked quarterbacks at football games will vanish, and babies will be missing from their cribs. Popular Christian films present this perspective, but it is a total distortion of the text.

The apostle Peter also wrote: “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” (2 Peter 3:10). According to Peter, this coming of Jesus is definitely not a silent, secret event that precedes a seven-year period of tribulation. Rather, this day arrives suddenly, with “a great noise” and is clearly connected with the end of the world!



*Dear Jesus, may I watch and be sober so
that I am ready for your soon return.*





Why did God seek to kill Moses?



"It came to pass on the way [to Egypt], at the encampment, the LORD met [Moses] and sought to kill him" (Exodus 4:24).

This strange story about Moses raises several questions: Did God really try—and fail—to destroy Moses? Did the Lord swing at Moses and miss? What's really going on here? Let's step back and look at the larger context of this surprising Bible passage.

As a young man, Moses had been trained in all the ways of Egypt. But after killing an Egyptian taskmaster, he had to run for his life. Moses spent the next 40 years in the land of Midian as a shepherd. There he learned about taking care of sheep, which helped prepare him to shepherd God's people out of Egypt.

But Moses had important spiritual lessons to learn as well. After God spoke to him from the burning bush, calling him to be a deliverer, Moses headed off to Egypt with his wife and oldest son to meet with his brother Aaron. It was on this trip that God confronted Moses.

Here is the pivotal point in the story: Moses neglected to obey God's instructions regarding circumcision—a sign given to Abraham as a way to show devotion to the God of Israel. Moses was not living the truth he was going to profess. He was to be God's man in Egypt, but he had not been God's man in his own household.

The reason it says "the Lord sought to kill him" might be because he encountered an angel of judgment along the road as a warning, perhaps much like Balaam faced. Some translations read, "The Lord was about to slay him."

We don't know exactly why this ritual had not been performed, but it appears that his wife thought the rite was barbaric. Whatever the case, Moses had not taken this important step of obedience to God. The mark of circumcision was not just a physical sign to the Hebrews, but a spiritual sign of accepting a covenant made with the Lord. Just as the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the doorposts marked the culmination of the Exodus, so this blood of the circumcision of Moses' son marked its beginning.



Dear Jesus, may I always be obedient to all Your commands, beginning with my own household.



For Further Study: Genesis 17:1–14; Exodus 12:12, 13



Does Scripture say dogs will not be in heaven?

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:14, 15).



Before tackling the question about whether we'll have pets in heaven, let me first clarify that the word “dog” is often used figuratively in Scripture to depict vile, shameless people. For instance, the apostle Paul says, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of mutilation!” (Philippians 3:2). He's identifying people who are deluded and claim to be perfect. Dogs in the East didn't have pet owners and wandered the streets and back alleys. Revelation 22:14, 15 is not speaking about literal dogs.

There is no question that animals will be in heaven. I encourage you to read Isaiah 11:6–9 to see a beautiful picture of what heaven will be like. You'll see that in paradise, every animal could potentially be a pet because none of them will be “wild” and they will not be afraid of people. God does everything perfectly, so in paradise, we will find complete love and happiness, which will include loving companionship with the animals.

But what about our pets from this life? Will they be with us in the new earth? Some argue that such a scenario would be impossible, because the sacrifice of Jesus was to redeem humans, not animals. And it is true that there aren't any Scriptures that state animals will be resurrected with new bodies.

However, this might not rule out the possibility. God will bless His people with eternal life as a gift of His grace when Jesus comes again. So if the all-powerful God of the universe wants to surprise us with the gift of resurrected kittens, puppies, horses, fish, rabbits, birds, turtles, or whatever other critters we love on this earth, He is certainly able to do so!

Whatever the answer on this one, I promise no one will be disappointed. We'll just have to make sure we are there, then wait and see.



Dear Jesus, thank you for the gift of animals and the wonderful companionship they can bring us.





Did Moses actually write the Ten Commandments?



“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exodus 34:27, 28).

At first glance, it looks like the Bible indicates Moses wrote down the Ten Commandments on the tablets. In the King James, it states, “He wrote upon the tables . . .” with the pronoun “he” in small letters. In the New King James, all pronouns referring to God are capitalized. And so the above text reads, “And He wrote on the tablets.”

We can be sure that God alone wrote on the tablets by looking at other Scriptures. Speaking of this same event, Moses later wrote: “At that time the LORD said to me, ‘Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make yourself an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; and you shall put them in the ark.’ So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the LORD had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me” (Deuteronomy 10:1–4).

Another text makes it very explicit: “When He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18). And elsewhere, “Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets” (Exodus 32:16). It is true that the second set of tablets were hewed out by Moses, but God wrote on them.



Dear Lord, please write your law on my heart that I may always live for you.



For Further Study: Deuteronomy 4:13; 1 John 5:2, 3



When will Christ set up His kingdom upon the earth?

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1, 2).



Jesus will set up His kingdom on Earth at the end of the 1,000-year period spoken of in Revelation 20. This chapter outlines events leading up to the establishment of His kingdom spoken of in the next chapter. After the second coming of Christ, Satan is bound to the earth for "a thousand years" (v. 2). During this time the righteous reign with Jesus in heaven for "a thousand years" (v. 4).

At the close of this 1,000 years "the holy city, new Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:2) comes down from heaven to the earth with all the saints (Zechariah 14:1, 4, 5) and the wicked dead of all ages are raised to life (Revelation 20:5). At this time, Satan will be released for "a little while" (v. 3) "to deceive the nations" (v. 8) and gather the wicked to make one last attack on "the camp of the saints" (v. 9). Of course, they will not succeed but be devoured by fire. But first there is a "great white throne" judgment, which is then followed by the final destruction of all sin and sinners in the lake of fire, which is "the second death" (v. 14).

When this fire comes down out of heaven and devours, it also purifies the earth and burns up all traces of sin and sinners (2 Peter 3:10), leaving only ashes (Malachi 4:3). Then God creates a new earth and gives it to the righteous. "God ... will dwell with them, ... and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). Faultless, holy, happy beings, restored once again to the perfect image of God, will at last be at home in a sinless world as God originally planned. Only the most foolish person would choose to miss this!



*Heavenly Father, I choose to join your family
and someday dwell on the earth made new.*





Why does the Bible say to not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk?



"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk"
(Deuteronomy 14:21).

It's not always easy to understand certain Old Testament laws because the purpose for them is unclear to us. That's why it is important to study the context of the passage and other Bible verses that pertain to the topic. We can also learn more about a Bible verse by understanding the culture in which the people lived at that time.

Archaeologists have discovered interesting texts in ancient Syria that explains that boiling a sacrificial young goat in their mother's milk was a ritual practice of the Canaanites. This was the heathen nation that practiced so many abominable things that God commanded Israel to "utterly destroy" them (Deuteronomy 20:17). The Israelites only partially carried out this commission.

Another horrible practice in Canaanite worship to the god Molech was to sacrifice children by having them "pass through the fire" (Deuteronomy 18:10). The Lord wanted to protect His people from these ghastly ceremonies. "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations" (v. 9).

God did not want His people to follow heathen rituals. It was His desire to have a clear line of separation from the idolatry of these nations. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5,6).

Some have suggested this Canaanite idolatrous ritual worked to break down the sacredness of the family, even in the animal world. Parents should protect their children, not offer them as sacrifices to some evil god. There is to be a distinction in how Christians live. "'They shall be Mine,' says the LORD of hosts, 'on that day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him'" (Malachi 3:17).



*Dear God, thank you for separating for
yourself a special people. I choose to
be part of your heavenly family.*



For Further Study: Exodus 23:19; 34:26



Should we hear more teaching today about Christ's second coming?

"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"
(Titus 2:11–13).



What is good news for some is bad news for others. When it comes to the second coming of Jesus, there is one for whom this spells disaster. The devil does not want people to know about, think about, or prepare for Christ's return. The "blessed hope and glorious appearing" of our Savior spells doom for this defeated enemy. His work to destroy God's people will end.

Until then, he continues to deceive and distract humans from this important Bible teaching by encouraging them to seek the traps of this world. Even members of the church will not want to hear this special doctrine on Christ's coming. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers" (2 Timothy 4:3).

Satan knows that the second coming is the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) of the Christian, and that once understood, it changes the lives of men and women and leads them to take a personal, diligent, and active part in spreading that good news to others so that Christ's coming may be hastened. This infuriates Satan, so he influences those who have "a form of godliness" (2 Timothy 3:5) but "denying its power," 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" (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Those who deny, ignore, or make light of Christ's second advent (as a literal, soon-coming event) are specifically fulfilling Bible prophecy—and doing the devil a favor. But for the Christian, it is the grand climax of the gospel. Since we do not know the exact time of this event, we should be ready at all times.



*Dear Jesus, please come quickly. I
long to be with you forever.*



For Further Study: Isaiah 25:9; Matthew 24:31; Revelation 22:20

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Should infants be baptized?



"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Some people view the rite of baptism as some magical ceremony that, in and of itself, assures a person of salvation. But that line of thinking makes about as much sense as a man walking up to a random woman on the street and forcing her to put a ring on her finger and then declaring they are married. There's much more to baptism than being immersed under water. It symbolizes conversion.

Jesus said that we must be born of water *and* the Spirit. For that reason, no one should be baptized unless he or she (1) knows the truth of God, (2) believes it, (3) has repented, and (4) has experienced conversion. No baby could possibly qualify here. No one has a right to baptize a baby. In fact, to do so completely disregards God's direct commands regarding baptism.

Misguided men in the church, years ago, decreed that unbaptized babies are lost, but this is scripturally untrue. It defames God as an unjust tyrant who would destroy innocent infants who died, simply because unworthy parents failed to have baptism administered. Such a teaching is tragic beyond words. It is bad enough to sprinkle babies and call it baptism. It is infinitely worse to hold to the unscriptural concept that babies are lost eternally because careless parents failed to do their duty.

Even though infants and small children do not qualify for baptism, it does not exclude them from God's kingdom. Remember Jesus' words: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). Christ responded positively to mothers who brought their children to Him to be blessed. Now, the practice of child dedication is biblical and in harmony with Jesus' actions. It affirms the parents' desire to lead their children to a point where they will, of their own accord, accept Christ and one day be baptized.



Dear Lord, it is my sincere desire to be born again of water and the Spirit. Live inside my heart today.



For Further Study: Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17; Acts 8:12, 13



What does the Bible mean when it says don't bring "the wages of a harlot" or the "price of a dog" into the Lord's house?

"You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 23:18).



It's helpful to back up one verse and read the entire passage. It says, "There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel" (v. 17). The King James uses the word "whore" and "sodomite," and the Revised Standard speaks of "cult" prostitutes. This passage is referring to the immoral ritual of religious prostitution, in which people gave themselves as "servants to the gods." This idolatrous practice still exists in some cultures today.

God detests this rite. It degrades human beings, distorts one's view of the true God, and breaks down the sanctity of marriage. It is unholy and sinful. Connecting prostitution with religion is abhorrent and destroys the consciences of all who participate in such demeaning acts. Would we rob a bank and kill people in order to gather money as an offering to God?

The "price of a dog" speaks of the practice of a male prostitute. The Bible sometimes uses the word "dog" to speak of those who practice evil. It was an uncomplimentary term. Goliath said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" (1 Samuel 17:43). It was one of the ultimate put-downs (see 2 Samuel 16:9). In Eastern countries, dogs often ran wild and were not very clean. They symbolized those who are cast out of society.

Moses warned, "Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness" (Leviticus 19:29). King David described true worship: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol" (Psalm 24:3, 4).



Dear heavenly Father, I dedicate myself to you to remain pure in heart in all my actions and thoughts.





Does Matthew teach that some commandment breakers will be in heaven?



"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

Some understand this passage to mean that a person called the "least" will still be in the kingdom of heaven. But reading the next verse gives us more perspective. Jesus goes on to say, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 20).

The scribes and Pharisees loved the *appearance* of keeping God's law, but they did not keep it. They often set aside some laws for their own selfish purposes. "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4). In one Sabbath incident, Jesus said to them, "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?" (John 7:23).

Jesus was called a lawbreaker, but His teachings actually show that He was stricter in keeping the moral law than the so-called experts in the law. He explained, "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). In this passage they were quick to ignore the needs of their own parents and break the fifth commandment for their own profit, "making the word of God of no effect" (v. 13).

To be called "least" in the kingdom of heaven doesn't mean you are the last in line and will somehow squeeze through the pearly gates. The word is not a noun, but an adjective that means to be unfit or unworthy to be there. Christ assures us that those who belittle His law will be like the scribes and Pharisees who "will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."



Dear Jesus, may I exalt your law and uphold it in every area of my life.



For Further Study: Luke 6:1–11; Romans 3:31



Doesn't the Bible teach that King David's house would be established forever?

*"My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul.
... And your house and your kingdom shall be established
forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever"
(2 Samuel 7:15, 16).*



The Bible also says that Saul's kingdom was promised to last forever (1 Samuel 13:13), but obviously it ended. The same is true with David's kingdom. Because his descendants were unfaithful to God, the final person in David's lineage to be king, Jehoiachin, died in Babylon. The promises to David's literal kingdom were conditional. Notice the words "if" and "then" in these words to David's son: "Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Kings 9:4, 5).

The Lord's words were even stronger in what followed: "But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples" (vv. 6, 7). That's exactly what happened.

But the conditional promises to literal Israel have now been fulfilled *spiritually* through Christ. Where the Jewish nation failed, Jesus succeeded in perfectly keeping the law. "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute righteousness in the earth" (Jeremiah 23:5). This Branch is Christ!

When Israel completely turned from Jesus, the kingdom was taken from them (Matthew 21:43). The promises to literal Israel are now given to spiritual Israel and all who exercise faith in Christ are children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9). Christ's kingdom will last forever.



*Dear Jesus, I long for the day when your kingdom
is finally established and you reign eternally.*



For Further Study: Acts 13:46; 1 Peter 2:9, 10; Revelation 11:15

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What does the Bible mean when it says what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven?



“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

Jesus is speaking here on how to deal, in the framework of the church, with a person who sins. “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15). Christ goes on to say that if the sinner doesn’t listen to you, bring someone else. Only if it is necessary should it be brought to the whole church body. The principle is to keep the circle as small as possible.

The last step in dealing with a person who does not reconcile themselves to the church is to dismiss them from membership. When a member refuses to repent or acknowledge wrongs, they are no longer considered part of the congregation. These instructions carry real weight based on Matthew 18:18. The terms “bind” and “loose” are legal words demonstrating that the local church has power in disciplining members.

Some churches are built on a structure of hierarchical authority, a top-down system that gives certain people power on their own to dismiss members. This passage uses the plural term for “you” and is set in the context of the “church,” not any particular individual in the church, whether a religious leader or member. It speaks of a representative system of shared authority. Furthermore, what is carried out by the collective local church in these matters is acknowledged by heaven.

But let’s be careful to follow the spirit of this passage. When a problem arises, it is not to be quickly dragged in front of the whole church. We should seek to resolve issues with as few people as possible. The goal is healing and reconciliation, not war and proving someone is wrong. Even if they are dismissed, we are to still care for them, for Christ reached out to the heathen and tax collectors in genuine love and interest.



Dear Jesus, I commit to follow your guidelines for resolving issues between myself and others in the church.



For Further Study: Matthew 16:19; John 20:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 5:1–5

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does it mean when Elijah prayed for a boy's "soul" to come back to him?

"He stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, 'O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him.' Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived" (1 Kings 17:21, 22).



The Hebrew word for "soul" in this passage is *nephesh*, which has been translated many different ways. Notice the following examples: "So God created great sea creatures and every living thing (*nephesh*) that moves" (Genesis 1:21). "Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons (*nephesh*), and take the goods for yourself'" (Genesis 14:21). "You shall not eat flesh with its life (*nephesh*), that is, its blood" (Genesis 14:21).

The translation "soul" is misleading, giving people the idea that some entity after death can float around and think. But the Bible does not teach us that we become an immortal spirit-like ghost that's separate from the body. The 700 references in Scripture to the word *nephesh* never once give this idea. The best translation is the word "life," which would read, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's *life* come back to him." Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the *life* of the child came back to him, and he revived."

A clear example of properly translating this word *nephesh* in reference to Elijah is found in the story of him running away from Jezebel after God's incredible triumph on Mount Carmel. "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life (*nephesh*), for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1 Kings 19:4).

When a person dies, the Bible teaches there is no conscious thought. "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17). Jesus called this unconscious state of the dead "sleep" in John 11:11–14.



Dear Father, thank you for giving me life. I look forward to the day when all death will come to an end.



For Further Study: Job 14:12; Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:6

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Did people have the Holy Spirit before the day of Pentecost?



“Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ 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” (John 7:37–39).

There are many references in the Bible to the Holy Spirit working in the lives of people before the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:18). John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). David earnestly prayed, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11). The Spirit worked in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:3) and on the heart of Joseph (Genesis 41:38).

The reference in the book of John speaks of a *special* outpouring of the Spirit promised on the day of Pentecost. After His resurrection, Jesus “commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4, 5). The purpose of this special outpouring is explained: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (v. 8).

The fact that a special gift of the Spirit promised by Christ to the disciples at the launching of the church does not mean the Holy Spirit did not work previous to this time. It simply points to an extra measure to help start the work of evangelizing the whole world. Before Christ comes, a similar but greater outpouring of the Spirit, called the “latter rain,” will be given to help complete the gospel work (see Joel 2:23 and James 5:7).



*Lord, I long for more of your Spirit.
Fill me to overflowing today.*



For Further Study: Numbers 11:25; Ezekiel 11:5; 2 Peter 1:20, 21

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Doesn't Proverbs teach that it is okay to drink alcoholic beverages?

"Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart" (Proverbs 31:6).



One of the saddest of pastoral visitations is when I'm called to visit and pray for a church member who is dying. Often these precious souls are suffering from a fatal illness that is extremely painful. As they near the end of their lives, it is an act of compassion to provide them with a strong narcotic to deaden their pain and help them endure their misery. Of course, we earnestly pray for them to be miraculously healed, but that doesn't always happen.

In Bible times, they didn't have doctors or nurses who could give an injection of morphine to reduce the agony of people with a fatal condition. In Proverbs 31:6, we find an example of how "strong drink" was used back then to dull the throbbing hurt. When Jesus was crucified, He was offered a mixture of vinegar and gall for this same reason (see Matthew 27:34). Obviously, it was excruciatingly painful to be nailed to a cross, so soldiers dipped a sponge in this ancient "narcotic" to help the suffering victims cope with pain. Of course, Jesus refused even this help since He wanted His mind clear during this difficult trial.

Other passages in Proverbs make it clear that strong drink is not something to be freely taken. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. . . . At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper" (Proverbs 23:29, 30, 32).

And so, the Bible speaks of a particular situation when people are suffering under extreme circumstances and are facing death. It is out of compassion that we provide a painkiller to help our suffering loved ones. This is not a license for the recreational abusing of our bodies.



*Lord, I commit my mind and body to living
a clean and healthy life for your glory.*





Should we still honor our parents if they are abusive?



*“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you”
(Exodus 20:12).*

All of the commandments are a reflection of God’s loving character, so I don’t believe we can safely ignore any of them, regardless of the circumstances.

However, we need to understand what honoring our parents really means. It doesn’t necessarily mean condoning all their actions. Abuse in any form is wrong, evil, and against the principles of Scripture. That said, there is a certain inherent respect that should always be shown to a parent. Even when we disagree with them, we can do it respectfully.

I do believe that where abuse is involved, a person can respect a parent and still take action against that parent, such as the time King Asa removed his mother from power because she had set up an idol (2 Chronicles 15:16).

Obviously, if a parent asks you to break one of God’s commandments, you should decline. God must be honored above a parent.

Sometimes it might be necessary for adult children to keep a distance for a time, especially if the parent continues the abusive behavior or if you’re clashing continuously. Separation is also appropriate when parents are meddling, perhaps trying to interfere in the raising of a grandchild or in the marriage (see Genesis 2:24).

However, we should avoid cutting off all ties with our parents if it’s possible to retain some type of cordial relationship. “I never want to see you again,” is pretty harsh and usually unnecessary. People change—they change and we change. As a Christian, you want to have a redemptive relationship and learn how to resolve conflict.

Being a Christian means sometimes you have to be kind and loving to people who aren’t lovable. Jesus said, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44). Through the grace and power of Christ, the Christian can show mercy even to those who “spitefully use” them.



*Dear Lord, thank you for showing me great
mercy, and help me to show mercy to others,
even those who have hurt me in the past.
Heal my heart and fill it with your light.*



For Further Study: Proverbs 23:22; Ephesians 6:1–4



Does Isaiah 66:24 teach that the wicked aren't burned up when the earth is made new?

"They shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isaiah 66:24).



Many prophecies in the Old Testament have a dual application. They were first given to the nation of Israel and applied to the land in which they lived. God designed that the Jews would be the center of influence for His kingdom to all the world. The words of the prophets described local enemies and literal places. But the Hebrews failed to fulfill their obligations in these conditional prophecies. Yet the words do not fall into the dust, but rather they are raised up and applied to spiritual Israel in a universal sense.

In the poetic language of Isaiah, we listen to a victorious description of Israel looking upon the destruction of their enemies. Using hyperbole, he visualizes their annihilation. But does this passage mean dead bodies will forever be lying around on the new earth? Like other Bible teachings, we must look at the whole of Scripture on a topic.

God's Word clearly states, "'Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch. . . . You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1, 3).

In Isaiah 66:24, the tense of the Hebrew verb "does not die" means that the worm doesn't live forever, but will do its complete work before it ceases to exist. The same is true of the fire that is "not quenched." The same verb tense suggests that once this fire begins its work, it cannot be stopped until it has completely burned up what it is consuming.



*Lord, when all sin is destroyed, I pray
that I will be safe in your hands.*





Does the Bible teach men can forgive sins?



"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23).

Before diving into this specific text, let's first answer this Can a human being take away sin? The Bible makes many statements that clearly show that only Christ can cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We must go to Jesus to receive forgiveness. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

The Bible also defines blasphemy as man claiming to forgive sins. The scribes asked, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). If a human claims the power to forgive sins, he stands, as it were, in the place of God, which is blasphemy. "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God'" (John 10:33).

Some churches claim that certain religious leaders have the power to forgive sins. This action is not presented as acknowledging the work of God but standing in the place of God. They teach that a priest really and truly forgives sins because Christ has given him that power. But there are to be no humans standing between ourselves and God, "for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

So how are we to understand the words of Christ in John 20:23? The text is given to Jesus' disciples as representatives of His church on Earth. If a person has genuinely confessed and repented of sin before God, the church acknowledges and receives that individual into fellowship. But if there is a lack of genuine repentance, then the charges brought against an erring member are "retained." God gives authority to the church body, not an individual, to receive this person into membership.



Dear Jesus, I confess my sins to you and desire to be part of your earthly body, the church.



For Further Study: Acts 5:1–11; 1 Corinthians 5:9–13



Does the apostle Paul teach that if we think something is okay, then it's okay?

"To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled" (Titus 1:15).



Not at all. Paul is not saying that simply thinking something is pure makes it okay. Here he is writing to a man named Titus to advise him in the gospel work on Crete. Titus had some difficult people who were creating challenges in the church. Paul refers to "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" (vv. 10, 11).

These unconverted troublemakers were not cooperating with the church leaders. They gossiped, lied, and pressed others to follow Jewish rituals ("those of the circumcision") as a means of attaining salvation. They were fighting against the gospel message, which teaches that salvation comes through faith, not by works. In their effort to "contradict" (v. 9) Paul's work, they disrupted "whole households."

People who follow Christ and experience a deep conversion of the heart see God clearly and live pure lives (Matthew 5:8). "All things are pure" because they are living in Christ. Such members do not attempt to make themselves pure by trying to do good works, but allow the work of the Spirit to transform their minds (Romans 12:2).

On the other hand, when a person lives for themselves and attempts to become pure by legalistically following the law, they continue to live with defiled minds, fighting the same sin their entire lives (Romans 7:23) and having not been "renewed in the spirit" of their minds (Ephesians 4:23).

When a person with a defiled conscience tries to see a pure life without God, everything is distorted. It's like wearing the "wrong" pair of glasses, making all things blurry. That's why it is so important to follow Paul's admonition: "Whatever things are true . . . noble . . . just . . . pure . . . if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8). To the person with a pure mind, "all things are pure" because they have a pure perspective.



Heavenly Father, it is my desire to keep my mind and heart pure and undefiled.





Doesn't Ezekiel 16 encourage us to wear jewelry?



"I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty" (Ezekiel 16:11–13).

The context of this passage is not about whether we should or should not wear jewelry. It is a figurative picture of God redeeming His people from slavery. The people of God are compared to a bride given many gifts. It calls the attention of Israel back to the exodus, when the Lord instructed them to take from their neighbors jewels of silver and gold (Exodus 11:2, 3). These gifts were then used, not to adorn themselves, but to create the beautiful wilderness sanctuary (Exodus 25:1–8).

The message of Ezekiel 16 is that Israel "played the harlot" and removed her jewels and created idols. This happened when the nation formed alliances with foreign powers that led her away from the worship of the true God. Actually, when calling the people to prepare themselves before God, there are references to the Israelites taking off their jewelry (see Exodus 33:4–6).

When we look at Bible verses specifically addressing the adornment of Christians, the guidelines are quite simple. "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:3, 4). "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9, 10).

The jewelry that God wishes to place on His people is not outward adornment. The Lord values the pure jewels of modesty that draws people to look at Jesus, not at oneself.



Dear Lord, may my life be adorned with good works out of a love for you.



For Further Study: Exodus 35:21–29; Isaiah 3:16–26

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Do people become angels when they die?

“As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’ Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, ‘It is his angel’ ” (Acts 12:13–15).



When the apostle Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, the young lady, Rhoda, who answered the door could hardly believe it was him. In her excitement, she left Peter locked outside and rushed to tell the others. Since he had been previously delivered by an angel, the other believers in the house praying for Peter’s release apparently thought this might be his angel.

It is not strange that these followers of Jesus believed Rhoda saw a spiritual being. Even Christ’s disciples had moments when they thought they were seeing some type of spirit. When Jesus came to them on the water during a storm, it says, “When they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out” (Mark 6:49). After the resurrection, Jesus’ appearance alarmed some. “As they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit” (Luke 24:37).

Some people believe Acts 12:15 indicates that when people die they immediately become angels. During the time between the Old and New Testaments, many interesting theories about angels were formulated by Jewish teachers.

But the Bible teaches that angels are not of the same order as human beings (Psalm 8:5) and existed before people were even created (Job 38:4–7). Before any person ever died angels existed in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). God has provided each of His children a guardian angel (Matthew 18:10; Psalm 34:7). Someday God’s angels will come and gather the Lord’s people at the second coming of Jesus (Mark 13:27).



*Dear Lord, thank you for your angel messengers
who serve you and minister to your people.*



For Further Study: Genesis 28:12; Acts 5:19; Hebrews 1:14
Scan for more on this topic. ▶



What can I do or say so that my prayers are actually answered?



“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).

One of the first things I remind people who ask me this question is that we have a loving Father who wants to answer our prayers and give us good things. Sometimes people have the idea that God is reluctant or irritated when we come seeking answers or help. But this just isn't true. The Lord deeply cares about us and is delighted when we pray to Him. We can also have confidence that God hears us (1 John 5:14, 15).

Can we do things that increase the likelihood of God answering our prayers? The Bible addresses this across many verses. First of all, when we approach the Lord in prayer, we should be like Jesus, who said, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). We must be willing to give up our ideas about answered prayer and put all things into God's hands.

Don't hesitate to bring anything that troubles you to the Lord. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Prayer is a time in which we can roll our burdens into the hands of a loving God. Mix praise and thanksgiving into your prayers. “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Something I've found helpful is to find a quiet place where I am not interrupted by the busy things that often press on me. Jesus did this: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). I think it also helps to have times when you pray aloud. The disciples often heard Christ pray (Luke 11:1). As we pray in faith, even if the answer is no, we can know that God hears us and cares.



*Dear Jesus, teach me to pray so
that I may know you more.*



For Further Study: Deuteronomy 8:2; Jeremiah 29:13



According to Zechariah, aren't God's people to keep the Feast of Tabernacles forever?

"It shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).



First, we should ask if "all the nations which came against Jerusalem" did come "up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." The answer is obviously 'no.' And why not? Because God's people did not follow the conditions of the prophecy as outlined by the prophets.

There are many examples in the Bible of prophecies that changed because of certain conditions. Jonah preached that Nineveh would be destroyed, but the city repented and was saved (Jonah 3:5–10). King Hezekiah was warned he would die, but he earnestly prayed and was given more years to live (2 Kings 20:1, 5, 6). On the other hand, God told Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah would be spared if there had been just 10 righteous people in these wicked cities. There were not, and they were destroyed (Genesis 18:32).

When Jesus came, He fulfilled all the types and symbols of the Old Testament. The entire Jewish system and tabernacle services were perfectly completed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The temporary rituals, ceremonies, and feasts that pointed to the Messiah have now been fulfilled and are no longer necessary. Jesus has come! While we may learn from studying the Feast of Tabernacles, and some might even wish to keep the feast for teaching purposes, they are not required (see Colossians 2:14–17).

If the Israelites had kept their covenant with God and been a light to the world, then the surrounding nations would have come to Jerusalem as a center of evangelism for the world. But this did not happen. Now God's people are spiritual Israel, and someday all nations will come and worship. "Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:4).



Dear Jesus, in you all prophecies find their beginning and ending.





Didn't Jesus teach His followers that they would never see death?



"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51).

There are two different deaths spoken of in the Bible. The first death is natural to all people and will be experienced by everyone unless they are alive when Jesus comes. Christ spoke of this death as a sleep. He said, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (John 11:11). They misunderstood what Jesus meant, so He "said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'" (vv. 14).

But there is a second death also taught in the Scriptures. John wrote, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11). "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power" (Revelation 20:6). In John 8:51, Christ seems to be speaking of the second death.

The misunderstanding of the Jews regarding Jesus' words shows that they knew about the first death. "Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?'" (John 8:52, 53). It is obvious from this interchange that they were thinking about the first death, but Jesus was speaking of the second death.

The first death is not the final punishment for sin and rejecting God. Both righteous and unrighteous people experience the first death. Jesus came to deliver people from the second death, the final destruction from which there is no resurrection or hope. In the Bible's most famous verse, these two final outcomes, eternal life or eternal death, are brought forth. "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).



Dear Jesus, I believe in you and give my heart to you. Thank you for the promise of eternal life.



For Further Study: John 5:24; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27



Where did Cain find a wife?

“Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch” (Genesis 4:17).



As we read the story of Cain's fall in Genesis 4, it seems as if the time frame between verse 16 and 17 is only a couple of days. Though the story doesn't indicate this, some have wondered if Cain somehow found a wife who came from people other than Adam and Eve. They conjecture that perhaps somewhere else on Earth God also created Alfred and Elaine. But there is no Scripture passage to support this notion.

As Adam and Eve followed God's command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), they had many children. They were not encumbered with the degeneration brought about by sin that we see today. Not only did they live much longer lives, but also the genetic deficiencies seen today when close relatives marry and bear children did not exist. So Cain's wife would obviously be from the offspring of Adam and Eve. Brothers and sisters must have married.

The same question is raised regarding the children of Noah who survived the worldwide flood. Cousins must have married since there were no other people on the earth. Even up to the time of Abraham, we find close relatives marrying; Sarah was his half-sister. But as the effects of sin have multiplied, there is a greater risk of couples sharing recessive gene traits that can lead to an increase in birth defects. Eventually, God banned the practice.

There are a variety of laws concerning marrying first or second cousins across our planet. In some places it is encouraged, while in others it is illegal. Interestingly, the Bible speaks to this issue. “None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 18:6). The list of examples given in the text apparently does not include cousins. Examples of first cousins getting married can be found in Scripture, such as the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24:12–15).



Dear Jesus, thank you for the gift of marriage and guidelines to protect this holy union.





What does Jesus mean when He says believers will speak with new tongues?



*“These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues”
(Mark 16:17).*

Christ’s promise to His believers begins with the command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (v. 15). In order to fulfill this great commission, disciples then and now have needed help. Since there are so many different languages spoken in the world, missionaries need to speak in “diverse tongues” to reach people. If the followers of Jesus were to choose to speak in only one language, they would greatly narrow their available audience! Therefore, God promises to give them this supernatural help in spreading the gospel.

A dramatic fulfillment of this promise is seen in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, when Christ’s followers received a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jews from all over the known world, speaking in a variety of languages, heard the good news in their different native languages. Notice how people responded: “They were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language?’” (Acts 2:7, 8).

Unfortunately, the devil always seeks to distort God’s blessings. While many were touched to hear “the wonderful works of God” on the day of Pentecost, “Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine’” (v. 13). We should note that this gift was not given to the disciples while they worked with Jesus in Palestine. It was given at just the right time and in just the right place for the sharing of the gospel.

People are fascinated by miraculous signs, of course, but Jesus often refused to perform them. Why? They were not intended to be the foundation of faith. While miracles can encourage and help the work of God, they are not meant to take the place of a solid understanding of the Bible. Let’s be wary of signs that do not uplift the work of Jesus. God’s gifts always point people to Christ.



*Thank you, heavenly Father, for promising gifts
to help us spread your Word to all the world.
May I always use your help to glorify Jesus.*



For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 12:11, 27-31; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 14:7-19
◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Doesn't Romans 10:4 teach that Christ put an end to the Ten Commandments?

"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).



This text has been interpreted in a number of different ways. Some take it to mean that Jesus put an end to the moral law. In other words, He terminated the Ten Commandments. Yet we know, based on many other Scriptures, that the law is good and to be upheld. For instance, Paul writes, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

Another view is that Christ is the fulfillment of the law. He came to complete the law. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). In other words, Jesus gave richer and deeper meaning to the law.

But what does the passage mean? How is Christ the "end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes"? As with other difficult passages, it's best to look at the context in the surrounding verses. The apostle Paul is making an appeal in Romans 10 to his fellow Jews. He desires for them to be saved (v. 1). Verse 3 is especially enlightening: "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."

The problem many Jews needed to face was their fruitless attempt to make themselves righteous by keeping the law. Rather, it is through faith in Christ that we obtain righteousness, not by any of our own efforts. The purpose of the law is to point us to Jesus (Galatians 3:24), not as a means of being saved.

People are always tempted to "establish their own righteousness" (remember Cain's offering), and what could be more tempting for doing this than trying to keep God's law through solely our own efforts. When we look to Christ who died for us, this type of "using the law" will end because it's fruitless.



*Dear Jesus, I give up trying to obey you
without your Spirit and turn to your
grace for help in my time of need.*





What does 1 Samuel 16:14 mean that an evil spirit came from the Lord?



“The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him” (1 Samuel 16:14).

Because King Saul was no longer listening to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:26), Samuel—at God’s direction—anoointed David as king in Saul’s place. Then “the spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13). In verse 14, it says that the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, “and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him” (KJV).

Notice the part of the verse that says, “The spirit of the LORD departed from Saul.” That would be the Holy Spirit, right? When God’s Spirit goes out of a person, the devil’s spirit goes in. Nobody is neutral. Everyone has varying degrees of either God’s Spirit or the spirit of the enemy. When the Bible says “a spirit from the LORD” troubled Saul, it doesn’t mean God said, “I’ve got a devil to give to you.”

Consider the story of Job. When the devil came to the Lord and wanted to plague Job, he couldn’t do anything until God withdrew His protection. At that point, He said, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life” (Job 2:6). The next verse goes on to say, “So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils.” When the Bible says that an evil spirit came from the Lord, it means that God withdrew His protection from Saul after the wayward king rejected Him. Then these devils were allowed to bring a depression upon the fallen king.

The Bible says, “God . . . will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Although God allows you to be tempted, He’s not doing the tempting. James 1:13 says, “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.” God allows temptation to come, but He doesn’t send it.



*Dear Jesus, help me to be emptied of myself,
that you may fill me with your Holy Spirit.*



For Further Study: Job 2:1–10; 1 Samuel 15:10–26; 1 Samuel 16



Don't we need to be "dead" to the law if we are really going to live for God?

*"For I ... died to the law that I might live to God"
(Galatians 2:19).*



The first question to ask about this verse is: Who is to be dead? A quick reading of this passage leads some to think that it is the law of God that should die. But is the apostle Paul really saying we should toss the Ten Commandments aside? It is not the law that needs to die, but we ourselves who need to die. Of course, he's not speaking of a physical death, but a spiritual death.

The way Paul "died" was "through the law." He explains, "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). When Paul "died," he turned to Jesus. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

When sin was alive in Paul's life and he came to the law, it pointed out his need. Paul repented and died to his selfishness. Through faith in Christ, he could now live for God. The condemnation of the law was gone; it could no longer point out the sin in his life that was taken away by Jesus' blood.

The clearest explanation of this process is found in Romans 6: "Knowing this, 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. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. . . . For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:6–8, 10, 11).



Dear Lord, thank you for the law, which points out my sin and helps me see my need of Christ.





Does God cause natural disasters?



"It is not the will of your Father ... in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14).

It seems logical that if God is all powerful, He must be responsible for everything that happens on our planet. But there is a missing piece we must not overlook: Both good and evil exist in our world. There are flowers and thorns, fresh air and pollution, love and hatred.

Why? The devil was once Lucifer, a being who stood by the throne of God. He became jealous and began to spread rumors that God was selfish, controlling, and unjust. The accusations grew until Satan and a third of the angels were cast out of heaven to the earth (Revelation 12:7–9). Instead of immediately destroying the devil and creating confusion and fear in the hearts of all the other beings, the Lord allowed Satan to play out his ideas before the watching universe.

After Adam and Eve sinned, the world began to change (Genesis 3:17). The enemy was permitted to touch our planet and bring destruction through earthquakes, tornados, fires, and floods. As we come closer to the end of time, Jesus predicted these types of events will increase (Matthew 24:8). But God has not abandoned His people.

When Jesus came, He brought healing and hope. "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56). To questioning and blaming people, He once said, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone me?" (John 10:32). Evil does not come because God is unfair. It often comes because God is pushed away. "And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'" (Deuteronomy 31:17).

Yet sometimes innocent people suffer in this world of sin. Calamity does not always come to sinful people. Jesus more than once corrected that false teaching (see Luke 13:1–5). Catastrophes will not last forever. Christ promised to come and put an end to all calamities.



Dear Jesus, I look forward to the day when you will stop all suffering and destroy evil forever.



For Further Study: John 9:1–4; Revelation 21:3, 4



How can I become wise like Solomon?

“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” (James 1:5).



One of the most encouraging verses in the Bible on finding help is found in James 1:5. The apostle James doesn't limit this promise to a certain group, but says, “If any of you lacks wisdom . . .” Furthermore, when we ask God for help, he writes that the Lord gives *liberally and without reproach*. God is not only generous in helping us, but He does not express disappointment with such requests. The Lord is delighted when we come seeking His guidance.

It's also worth taking note that James says, “If any of you lacks *wisdom* . . .” The Greek word for wisdom is *sophia*, which is more than intellectual knowledge. Sometimes when looking for help in our lives, we seek for ideas that might only touch the surface of a problem. Wisdom goes deep and provides insight into overlooked factors, such as our motives.

One of my favorite ways to approach Bible study is to discover Christ in all the Bible. An interesting way Jesus is presented in Scripture is through a connection with wisdom. Christ embodies wisdom. The apostle Paul describes Jesus as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). The book of Proverbs regularly speaks of wisdom as a person (Proverbs 1:20; 8:1; 9:1–5). And so Christ is the source of all wisdom.

When seeking God's guidance, take time to search your heart and confess any known sin that might prevent God's blessing (Psalm 66:18). Think of your motives (James 4:3), have faith that the Lord can lead you (Psalm 32:8), and seek counsel from godly people (Proverbs 11:14).

Finally, be open to different ways God might be directing you. We call these “providences.” These are signs or indications of how the Lord could be opening or closing doors. It might be a special Bible verse, a comment from a Christian friend, or an opening pathway.



Dear Jesus, thank you for the promise to guide my steps and watch over me.



For Further Study: Proverbs 15:22; Isaiah 58:11; Romans 8:28

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





Did Jesus descend into hell when He died?



“Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” (Ephesians 4:8–10).

There are some who believe that hell is a burning place of eternal torment for sinners and that it exists somewhere down inside the earth. This viewpoint crept into the church when Christianity and paganism joined hands. The reference in Ephesians of Christ descending “into the lower parts of the earth” is interpreted by this group to mean hell. But can this view be supported from the Bible?

The word “hell” (which is not used in this passage) is used 54 times in the King James. In 12 cases, it does indeed refer to a place of burning. But we need to remember that the final destruction of the wicked in the fires of hell will happen at a future time (2 Peter 2:9). Jesus speaks of gathering the wicked for punishment at the “end of this world” (Matthew 13:40–42). Until then, all who are dead are in their graves and are awaiting the first resurrection to eternal life or the second resurrection to damnation (John 5:28, 29).

When Christ died, He was placed in a tomb. Jesus “descended” into a grave where He rested until resurrection morning (Luke 23:52–55). When He rose from the grave, Jesus broke the portals of the tomb. His victory over death was also marked by a small resurrection of others at His death. “The graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (Matthew 27:52). It was this group of people, who were captives of death, that Jesus took with Him into heaven when He ascended.



Dear Jesus, thank you for being victorious over death. I receive your gift of life today.



For Further Study: Acts 2:31; Philippians 2:5–11



Does the Bible teach that one day equals one thousand years to God?

"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"
(2 Peter 3:8).



The apostle here is writing about "scoffers" who, in the last days, will say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (v. 4). To those who feel impatient about the second coming, he attempts to show how time is relative. He assures them that God has not forgotten about them.

Years ago Albert Einstein said, "Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. That's relativity." Children in the third grade feel like it will take *forever* to get to the fourth grade. People waiting for someone who is late can feel like it's taking *forever*. The speed of time passing is relative to how you think and what you are experiencing.

That's what Peter is trying to explain when he says that with God time is not measured in the same way as with humans. God doesn't need a watch. The Lord never feels impatient. Because God is omniscient and knows the past, the present, and the future, He is not constrained by calendars and clocks. We live within the limits of minutes, hours, days, and years. God does not.

There is a rule for understanding prophetic time in the Bible called the day-for-a-year principle (see Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6), but this passage is not speaking of a particular Bible prophecy. It is simply showing our impatience compared with God's patience. "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" (1 Peter 3:9).

To people who scoff at the delay of Christ's coming, Peter says the Lord will come "as a thief in the night." But to those who trust in the Lord, we wait patiently for the blessed hope. When you are busy doing the Lord's work, time flies.



"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"





What does the Bible say about low self-esteem?



"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

While the Bible warns us to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, there are some who deny the value God places on each of us as His children. People who struggle to have a healthy perspective about themselves often have experienced serious pain from rejection in their lives. The Bible reminds us, "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" (1 Peter 2:9).

We need to remember that a loving heavenly Father brought us life. When we give our lives to Him, we are adopted into His family. John 1:12 tells us that when we receive Christ, we are given the "right" to become God's children. What a high privilege!

There is no one else in all the universe just like you. He saw you before you were born. "For You formed my inward parts; you covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13, 14). The Lord personally knows you. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

"But," you say, "you don't understand. God cannot love me. You don't know what I've done, where I've been, and what I am really like deep down inside. My background is so broken, my body is deformed, and my personality is simply obnoxious. God loves nice people, but He couldn't love me." To such people I would say, "Not according to the Bible."

Notice the word of the apostle Paul: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39). Yes, God really does love you!



Dear heavenly Father, may I truly believe and receive your love for me.



For Further Study: Jeremiah 29:11; Galatians 2:20

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What does it mean that some sins lead to death and others don't?

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that"
(1 John 5:16).



All sin leads to death (Romans 6:23). And since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), we are all doomed to eternal death. Yet Jesus provided a way out by offering His perfect life in exchange for our sinful lives.

Part of receiving Christ as our Savior is to repent. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). We also must confess. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Notice the context of 1 John 5:16: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

If we see someone struggling in sin and prayerfully lead that person to God's throne of grace, we know that person will be forgiven. But if a person adamantly refuses to listen to God or one of God's representatives, the Lord will not forgive him. We cannot ask God to forgive another on their behalf. They must themselves confess and repent of their sin.

God respects a person's choice and will not force someone to accept Jesus. When a person continues to turn from the wooing of the Holy Spirit, they are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31). While we should continue to pray for all those we love, not knowing whether they have reached this point, we cannot prevent others from sin leading to death if that is their final choice.



Dear Lord, guide me in praying for those who have lost their way. May I respect each person's choice while showing them love and patience.





How can I live with more confidence?



“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18, 19).

It is not God’s plan for you to live in constant fear. It can paralyze you from making good choices or facing difficult circumstances. You are not alone when it comes to feeling fear, anxiety, or worry. And not all fear is bad. It can keep us on alert for possible dangers around us. The Lord created us with a “fight or flight” response to help keep us safe. The problem with fear is when it becomes unmanageable or unreasonable.

One of God’s most courageous men in the Bible was afraid. King David faced many giants in his life. Goliath and King Saul wanted to take his life. He once wrote, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God . . . I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (Psalm 56:3, 4). The key to coping with fear for David was trust. He put his fears in perspective by remembering the power of God to protect him.

Nothing can melt our fears like keeping God’s love in our minds and hearts. The Bible teaches us that when love abides in the heart, fear is cast out. Solomon also reminds us, “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (Proverbs 3:24–26).

When your fears seem overwhelming, stop and pray. Breathe deeply and slowly, asking God to surround you with His love. Write down and memorize key Bible verses about fear. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).



Dear Jesus, may your presence assure me that I am safe in your hands.



For Further Study: Psalm 46:1, 2; 91:1–5

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does Paul teach that we have a spirit separate from our body?

*“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”
(1 Thessalonians 5:23).*



Human beings are very complex and wonderfully created. Sometimes, to grasp the different aspects of our being, we talk about different parts of us. The apostle Paul does this when showing how the sanctifying work of God works “completely” on our “whole” being. To illustrate how much of our lives are touched by the Lord, he speaks of the “spirit, soul, and body.”

The Greek word for “spirit” used here is *pneuma*, which comes from the word for “breath.” It is used to not only describe the life of a person (Luke 8:55), but also our mind and intelligence. Notice how Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit speaks to our minds and shares truth with us.

The word “soul” in this passage comes from the word *psuche*, from which we get our word psychology. More than our intelligent thoughts, this word seems to speak of our emotions and desires. Today we might use the word “heart” to capture this concept. It’s less about thinking and more about feelings and even instincts. This part of our lives is also touched by the Spirit and is where David desires God’s law to be written (Psalm 40:8).

Even our “body” is important to God, our very flesh and bone. When the Lord works on our minds, we are not driven by our lower nature. We desire to take care of our entire beings for His glory (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). But these different parts do not exist separately any more than trying to take a person’s brain from their skull and setting it aside.

The message of this passage is not to emphasize the different parts of our being as separate items, but the work of God on our whole being. We do not exist in separate entities and neither is the Spirit interested in just working on one aspect of our lives. God works completely!



Dear Jesus, take my whole being—spirit, soul, and body—and purify all of me for your purposes.





How do I keep the Sabbath when I have a work conflict?



“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Members of Sabbathkeeping churches observe the seventh day as God’s holy rest day, from sundown on Friday evening until sundown on Saturday evening. During this time, according to the commandment, they put away all unnecessary work in order to worship and keep the Sabbath holy. It is not a day to catch up at home on odd jobs or engage in secular amusements, but it is sacred and devoted to God.

One of the best ways to deal with Sabbath work issues is to write a letter to your employer explaining your decision to become a Sabbathkeeper. Share that it is your religious conviction to observe God’s Sabbath and that it would be a violation of your beliefs to work during those hours. According to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States, accommodation should be made for you.

Show a willingness to work with your employer on a solution that works for both of you. For instance, you can offer to work on Sundays, holidays, or evenings to cover these hours. Seek to cooperate and show that you have an interest in the company and appreciate working for them. Offer to come in and talk further with them if that would help.

Most pastors will assist you in giving counsel and writing such a letter. Many Sabbathkeeping churches also have a religious liberty director who is dedicated to supporting a person in your circumstances, as well as those being asked to take exams on Sabbath or if a person has a new employee who creates challenges.

Laws vary in different countries and existing laws in your country can change. There will come a time when governments and religious organizations will take away freedom and seek to coerce people to worship against their convictions. True Christians will stand for their faith and on the Word of God, no matter the consequences. The Lord promises to watch over us in these trying times.



Dear Lord, I commit my life to obeying you under all circumstances, trusting you to lead and guide me.



For Further Study: Exodus 20:8–11; Isaiah 56:2; 58:13, 14



Aren't health laws in the Old Testament only intended for the Jews?

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).



God's health laws are actually found all over the Bible. In the New Testament, we read, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2). The Scriptures show a high priority in caring for our health. God gave us these guidelines because He knows what is best for the human body. "The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive" (Deuteronomy 6:24).

Jesus' death on the cross redeems us from sin, but it did not change what is deemed healthy or unhealthy. If pork is listed as something unhealthy before Christ died, it doesn't really make sense that Calvary suddenly makes eating swine's flesh healthy. Actually, the notion of "clean" and "unclean" animals goes all the way back to Genesis, long before there were any Jews. Noah was given instructions about clean and unclean animals (see Genesis 7:2); he wasn't a Jew.

We wrongly assume that our walk with God is somehow a spiritual-only exercise that has nothing to do with our lifestyle. But as our text points out, the Lord is interested even in what we eat and drink. God doesn't create meaningless rules to make our lives miserable. He loves us. "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

Modern science confirms that the guidelines in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 provide a diet that lowers the chance of disease. If we eat meat, we are taught to eat only those animals that have a split hoof and chew the cud, and fish that have both fins and scales, and to avoid birds of prey. A Christian will guard his appetite and not consume things like hogs, squirrels, rabbits, catfish, eels, lobsters, clams, crabs, shrimp, oysters, and frogs.

The apostle Paul reminds Christians: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). It's still good advice.



*Dear Jesus, I choose to keep my body pure
and clean in order to glorify you.*





What can a Christian do when feeling deep loneliness?



*“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you”
(Genesis 28:15).*

One day, Jacob deceived his father in order to receive the birthright from his older brother. Now his life was in danger, so his mother sent him away. As he laid down that first night on the ground, using a stone for a pillow, he felt very alone. Then God spoke to him the words in Genesis 28. The warmth of the Lord’s promise assured Jacob that he wasn’t really alone. God came close.

Elijah was afraid of a wicked queen who threatened to kill him. He ran into the wilderness and wished he would die. Finally, while Elijah hid in a lonely cave, God came close and spoke words of comfort to a man who *thought* he was alone. In a still small voice, the Lord assured lonely Elijah that he was not forsaken (see 1 Kings 19).

Jesus understands your feelings of loneliness. “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” (Isaiah 53:3). We can be assured that the Lord will not abandon us. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

Some people feel alone when they go through a divorce, their spouse dies, or they break up with someone special. But God makes this promise: “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name” (Isaiah 54:4, 5).

Out of the fullness of God’s love being poured into your heart, do not withdraw. Reach out to others. Invest your life in bringing happiness to those around you. Seek to make friends and cultivate healthy social connections.



*Dear Lord, as I draw close to you,
please draw close to me.*



For Further Study: Proverbs 11:25; 18:24



Is the idea of reincarnation supported in the Bible?

"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).



There are two major beliefs about reincarnation, neither of which is supported in the Bible. The first is the idea that you have an immortal soul that survives after your body dies and that can come back as another person. The second is the belief that people can make themselves pure through their own actions.

Almost half the people on Earth believe in reincarnation, the teaching that the soul never dies but is instead continually reborn in a different body with each succeeding generation. However, the Bible says, "The living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The Bible teaches that when a person dies, they return to the ground. "You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Psalm 104:29). After we die, there is no spirit entity that has mental powers to think. "His spirit (breath) departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish" (Psalm 146:4).

Satan invented the teaching that the dead are still somehow alive. Reincarnation, channeling, communication with spirits, spirit worship, and the "undying soul" are all inventions of the devil, with one aim to convince people that when you die you are not really dead. When people believe the dead are alive, they can be deceived and led astray.

People have always tried to make themselves good by their actions and somehow attain to a higher state. But the Bible teaches, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The apostle Paul says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23, 24).

There is no support in Scripture for the teaching of reincarnation. As Hebrews shows, after we die we will face the judgment. We are not given a second chance to "come back" and make ourselves better.



*Dear Lord, may I live each day in complete
surrender to you, always ready for your coming.*





Does it really make a difference to pray on behalf of other people?



“Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

I believe in the power of intercessory prayer, not only because I have seen God work in powerful ways to change lives, but also because the Bible repeatedly gives us instruction on how we should pray for others.

Many Bible heroes were intercessors. Abraham interceded for Sodom (Genesis 18), Moses cried out for Israel (Exodus 32), as did David, Samuel, Hezekiah, and others. Jesus is our great Intercessor, and all of our prayers go through Him. “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

One of the clearest models of intercessory prayer is found in Daniel 9. Here we read how this Old Testament prophet poured out his heart on behalf of his people. Like a type of Christ, Daniel identifies with the sins of the people, using the word “we” repeatedly in this prayer. He takes this time of intercession seriously by fasting and taking off his government work robes.

The Bible tells us the different types people for whom we should intercede, such as those in authority (1 Timothy 2:2), the church (Psalm 11:6), friends (Job 42:8), the sick (James 5:14), and even those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). It doesn’t take a special calling to intercede for others. All Christians should pray for their family and friends and those in need.

My favorite story that demonstrates the power of intercessory prayer is the apostle Peter’s release from prison by an angel. Notice how Luke introduces this incident: “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5). In this case, the answer to the prayers of the church for Peter’s release was a resounding ‘yes.’

We might be tempted to think that intercessory prayer is a waste of time because we don’t always “get” what we have prayed for. But we should remember to ask for God’s will to be done. Sometimes that means ‘no’ and sometimes it means “wait.”



*Dear Jesus, I hold up before you those I love
and pray that you watch over them today.*



For Further Study: 1 Samuel 12:23; Philippians 1:19; Romans 8:26, 27



Where is hell actually located?

“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” (2 Peter 2:4).



There are many mythologies and folklores in the world that describe hell. Some picture it as a place of eternal burning located somewhere inside the earth, a place where sinful people go immediately after death and are continually tortured. The Bible does not support this view.

According to the Scriptures, not one person is being punished in hell at this moment. “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9). Jesus explains when sinners will be cast into hellfire. “Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:40–42).

The fires of hell that destroy the wicked do not originate from inside the earth, but from heaven itself (Revelation 20:9). God is a consuming fire to all that is sinful (Hebrews 12:29). The wicked will be totally consumed by the fires of hell (Malachi 4:1, 3).

The evil angels spoken of in 2 Peter were cast down to hell and delivered into chains of darkness. When we read how Satan and his evil angels were removed from heaven, the Bible says they were “cast to the earth” (Revelation 12:9). It also says, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you” (v. 12).

There currently is no place where dead people have been cast to be burned up. All are asleep in their graves awaiting the resurrection of life or the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29). Not until the final judgment will the wicked be cast into a lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).



Dear Jesus, I give my life to you and look forward to the time when all sin will be forever destroyed.



For Further Study: Job 21:30, 32; 2 Peter 3:10; John 12:48

Scan for more on this topic. ▶





What does the Bible say about old wounds and bad experiences from my past?



“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Many adults struggle with pain and scars from their childhood. The abuse some people experienced growing up in a home filled with violence, abuse, neglect, or parents who had addictions is not a simple matter to “put away.” Some of these hurts go very deep, and the natural response is to cover them with unhealthy substances like drugs and alcohol or unhealthy behaviors. The problem is that you don’t just flip a switch and forget about such things. It’s like taking your garbage and sticking it in a closet in your house. Pretty soon your whole house stinks.

God’s plan is to bring healing to your wounded heart. We all want to forget about these things. But how do you “put away childish things”? We need to be honest about our past. We can’t fool ourselves or say nothing ever happened. That’s not being truthful. Paul counsels, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). There are many steps that can help you with this process. Sometimes a Christian friend or counselor can walk you through letting go.

Sometimes people overlook the role of forgiveness in facing their past. They stew in continued anger toward parents or others who hurt them. They feel justified in being angry, but it only traps them more deeply in bitterness and spoils their life. We will be free when we forgive “one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). This doesn’t mean we completely forget what happened, but it no longer becomes a central focus in our minds.

God has a purpose for our lives and can take all things, even the pain from our past, and make it into something beautiful in His time (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11). He promises to heal our broken hearts and give us “beauty for ashes” (Isaiah 61:3).



*Dear Jesus, please bring healing to my heart
as I put away the pain of my past.*



For Further Study: Genesis 50:20; Jeremiah 1:5

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



What are the “keys of the kingdom”?

*“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”
(Matthew 16:19).*



A key is used to open a lock. Jesus once explained that “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,” but, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34, 36). In spiritual terms, there is a key that sets us free from sin and allows us to enter heaven. When the disciple Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, he put his finger on the very key that sets people free from sin. Peter himself is not the key; it is his confession of Christ that is a key.

Some people take Jesus’ words to mean that only certain ecclesiastical authorities have been given power to forgive sin. They believe a few individuals can “bind” or “loose” people by rights given to them by God. But salvation does not come through a human, but through the words of Christ given to His disciples. The Bible is clear: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

Using a similar illustration, Jesus once explained that He was the “door” to salvation (John 10:9). When we accept the words of Christ and have faith in His name, we receive the gift of eternal life. It is not given to us by a church representative, but by Jesus. God uses people as instruments through which to share His message, but the messenger *is not* the message.

Many scholars believe a more accurate translation of Matthew 16:19 would be, “shall have been bound in heaven.” In other words, God’s church on Earth should be in harmony with heaven. The church requires and prohibits only the things that God requires or prohibits. The only authority a church body has to make decisions is when it works in cooperation with heaven.



Dear Jesus, may I be your messenger and share the gospel key with others, that they might have hope and enter heaven someday.





How can I help a friend who has quit attending church?



“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Most people who quit church do so because of a relational issue within the congregation or they are trying to cope with a challenging situation. Some do leave because of doctrine, but the majority have had a conflict with someone in the church or something happened in their life that is leaving them discouraged. It might be that they lost their job, are going through a divorce, had a car accident, or are taking care of an ill relative.

When people stop attending church, many of them are wondering if the church really cares about them. They might be discouraged with their own failures, but they might also focus on the lack of genuine love coming from others. Of course, this all begins to take a toll on their spiritual life. Bible study and prayer time can start to slip. They begin to question whether church is even relevant to their lives anymore.

That's why it's important for members to take initiative and reach out to missing members. Like the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, Jesus pursues those who wander away.

When making contact with someone who has stopped coming to church, put away any critical or condemning attitudes you might have and focus on being kind and understanding. If they are going through a difficulty, try listening without being judgmental. It might be tempting to start lecturing them on their lifestyle, but it would be better to demonstrate love and acceptance at this starting point.

You might eventually ask a couple of open-ended questions. “Tell me about growing up in the church. What was it like for you?” Another question is, “I understand you used to attend church. I’m interested in what led to you stopping.”

Eventually you can share your own story of coming to know Jesus and what the church means to you. You can share appropriate literature with them or even get together with them outside of church. At some point, as the Holy Spirit leads you, you can invite them to come back.



Dear Jesus, please give me a heart to pursue those who have wandered from the church.



For Further Study: Luke 15:1–32; 2 Corinthians 5:20

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Doesn't Romans 14:5 teach that it really doesn't matter which day we keep holy?

"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind"
(Romans 14:5).



Some people assume that the apostle Paul is talking about the Sabbath day in this passage. But nowhere in this verse or the entire chapter does he ever use that term. He only speaks of "one day above another." The context makes it clear that the discussion was over ceremonial laws, which were raising questions in the minds of Jews who converted to Christianity. Notice how Paul sets the tone for this chapter by stating, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over *doubtful things*" (Romans 14:1, my emphasis).

When we study the life and practices of Paul, we notice that he was a Sabbathkeeper. There is no doubt that he kept the seventh-day holy (see Acts 13:42–44). The Sabbath was not part of the ceremonial law; it's found in the unchanging moral law of the Ten Commandments.

Read Exodus 20:8–10. The very next verse reminds us, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (v. 11). That means the Sabbath was established at creation, before sin, and before there was ever a Jew. The Sabbath commandment is not something to doubt.

The context to Romans 14:5 is really about fasting. "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks" (Romans 14:6). This is a clear reference to "fast" days, not Sabbath days. Some Jewish Christians believed there was merit in fasting on specific days and so were tempted to criticize others who didn't follow suit.

The reason Paul wrote this was to encourage people to be tolerant toward those who sincerely believed they must continue to observe certain ceremonial days.



Lord, help me to be understanding of my fellow Christians and not quick to criticize their actions.





Why are there so many denominations if they all claim to follow Jesus?



“In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, ‘We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach’” (Isaiah 4:1).

The fact that you call an orange an apple doesn’t make the orange an apple. In Isaiah 4:1, the seven women say they will eat their own food and wear their own apparel, yet they want to take a man’s name. It reminds me of how truth has been compared to food—or bread—in John 6:35 and apparel is a symbol of righteousness in Revelation 19:8. How many churches call themselves by the name Christian but don’t uphold the bread of truth and teach us to wear Christ’s robe of righteousness?

God’s church is defined by the apostle Paul as the pillar of truth. He wrote Timothy on how people “ought to conduct” themselves “in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). If a denomination is not teaching truth, it is not truly God’s church.

Daniel predicted that a time would come when a religious power would “cast truth down to the ground” (Daniel 8:12). Paul warns, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed” (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

We should expect there to be false churches that do not teach truth from Scripture but teach “as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Otherwise, why would Paul encourage us to “test all things; hold fast what is good”? (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The book of Revelation speaks of God’s end-time church and gives us indicators for knowing if a denomination is truly following the Lord. Of this remnant people, the apostle John writes, “The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). God’s true church stands on biblical truth.



Dear Lord, I am committed to follow truth and be part of your true church in the last days.



For Further Study: Isaiah 8:20; Revelation 14:12

◀ Scan for more on this topic.



Does the Bible teach us to pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus?

“His mother [Mary] said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (John 2:5).



There are many religions in the world in which people pray to idols or pagan gods and claim their prayers are answered. I do not believe that is proof enough or is sufficient criteria to determine whether or not we should therefore pray to Mary.

Jesus once said that our Father in heaven “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). That tells me the Lord answers prayers of all kinds of people because He loves them, even if they are sometimes praying to the wrong god.

For the record, I believe that Mary was a saint; I believe she was the mother of Jesus, and I certainly believe in the virgin birth. But I do not find any Scripture to support that we are to pray to Mary. If you use the argument that someone prayed to Mary and received an answered prayer, then what about people who pray to cats or cockroaches and fully believe their prayers were answered? I am convicted that it is the Bible that should dictate to *whom* we give worship and direct our prayers.

The Scriptures are clear on this point. In fact, the very beginning of God’s Ten Commandments states: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Worshiping Mary places her in a position equal with God and violates the first commandment.

Moreover, to claim that Mary is sinless denies the Scripture that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). It is also problematic to pray to Mary because of what the Bible teaches about death. “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). As far as we know, Mary is in the grave waiting for the resurrection.

So the best way to honor Mary is to follow her instructions to obey Jesus: “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5).



Dear Jesus, thank you for the life of Mary, a godly example of a faithful woman and mother.





Does God heal people today as He did in Bible times?



"Jesus went about all Galilee ... preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23).

Jesus was not just interested in teaching; He also spent a significant part of His ministry making blind eyes see, opening deaf ears, removing fevers, and even raising people from the dead. Christ cared about the physical bodies of the people to whom He ministered.

When Christ sent out His 12 disciples, the Bible says, "When He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matthew 10:1). The ministry of healing others was not intended only for Bible times, but for all ages.

In the early church, James, the brother of Jesus, gave us instructions on special prayer for those who are sick. "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" (James 5:14, 15).

There are a couple guidelines to keep in mind when we pray for the sick. First, this verse suggests that a person who asks for this anointing should search their hearts and confess all known sins. Second, when we pray for healing, we should also follow Jesus' example of stating, "Your will be done" (Luke 11:2; 22:42). Sometimes people are laid to rest in the grave; it does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith. (Think of what happened to John the Baptist.) Yet a person can sincerely know that someday, at the resurrection, God will certainly "raise" them up.

Finally, we should be cautious about so-called "faith healers." There have been many examples of bogus healings where people were set up to "pretend" to be ill by a religious leader, and then later acted as if they were healed. Even Satan can delude people with healing tricks (Revelation 16:14).



Dear Jesus, thank you that you are the same healer today as you were in Bible times.



For Further Study: Exodus 15:26; Matthew 4:23; Acts 5:16



Is there anything wrong with having a Christmas tree?

“She brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger” (Luke 2:7).



There’s little reason to believe that Jesus was actually born on December 25; instead, He was probably born in the fall. One reason is that Augustus Caesar would not have required people to travel for a census during the middle of winter. Second, shepherds wouldn’t have been out in the fields in late December because the climate was too cold. Third, we know Jesus’ birthday was around the time of His baptism (Luke 3:23), that He ministered 3½ years and died during Passover. Subtract 3½ years from the springtime when He died and you come to the fall. (No one knows the exact date.)

The significance of December 25 comes from ancient cultures of the Northern Hemisphere that noticed the days getting shorter up until December 21 and then getting longer again about December 25. They called it the New Birth of the Day, among many other names. The origins for the day are rooted in astronomy more than Christianity.

Just because something has a pagan connection doesn’t automatically make it wrong for a Christian; it’s only wrong if it violates a Christian principle. There’s no violation of a Christian principle in commemorating the birth of Christ. However, there’s no command to do it either. If a person’s conscience bothers them, they can freely choose not to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Jeremiah 10:3–5, which talks about carving idols from a tree, has no connection to Christmas trees as we know them. The Christmas tree comes from a tradition in Scandinavian countries; they would cut down and decorate a tree. An evergreen tree doesn’t lose its leaves, and that supposedly represents an enduring life.

There’s also nothing wrong with exchanging gifts or giving gifts to the Lord. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Of course, if you’re spending yourself into oblivion or only thinking about what gifts you’re going to get, that’s a poor spirit—but Christmastime can actually be a good opportunity for believers to witness about Jesus.



*Lord, if I choose to commemorate your birth,
help me to do it with a spirit of thankfulness
and in a way that honors you.*





Doesn't Revelation 3:14 teach that Jesus was created?



"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God' " (Revelation 3:14).

A quick reading of this Bible verse might sound like Jesus was created when our world was first made. The Greek word for "beginning" here is *arche* and can be understood in an active or passive way. If we take it in the passive sense, then it would indeed suggest Jesus was created at the beginning of creation. But in the active sense, it would mean Jesus *is* the Creator, the great Beginning of all things. Notice how the NKJV capitalizes the word "Beginning" to emphasize this latter understanding.

Picture yourself standing in Eden talking with Adam and Eve. As you take in all the beauties surrounding you, you might gasp and say, "Wow! Who *began* all of this?" They would answer, "Jesus is the Beginner. He initiated all that you see. Christ is the Creator who started all things in our world."

Many other Bible verses support Christ as the One who stands at the beginning of all creation. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1–3). If *all things* were made through Christ, then He must be eternal, self-existing, and have no beginning.

In the book of Hebrews, this same truth shines through: "[God] 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" (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus made more than our Earth. The passage says He made the "worlds." The phrase "all things" is pretty inclusive and covers the entire universe.

Christ is the One who initiates, who is the prime mover, and *begins* all things. John is simply pointing out that Jesus is our Creator.



Dear Jesus, thank you for creating our world. I look forward to the time when you will make the earth new, like it was in the beginning.



For Further Study: John 8:58; Philippians 2:5–12; Revelation 1:8



Is homosexuality a sin?

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites” (1 Corinthians 6:9).



The Bible makes clear statements about the practice of homosexuality. The apostle Paul writes, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (Romans 1:26, 27).

In the Old Testament, we find laws about practicing homosexual behavior. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). The Bible outlines many sexual perversions and teaches that the only pure sexual relationship is between a husband and a wife. All else is a form of adultery.

There are two important points that get lost in the discussion about homosexuality. First, the Bible does not condemn people for having same-sex attractions, but it does condemn the act of homosexual behavior. Being tempted is not sin, but acting on that temptation is sin. Like any other sinful behavior, the Lord asks us to repent and promises to forgive us.

This leads to a final point. There is hope for the person practicing homosexual behavior. God promises to give us power to stop all sinful actions. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul describes different types of sinful activities, including homosexuality. He then states, “Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

We should treat all people with respect and kindness, regardless of their sexual orientation. At the same time, we can remember, “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 the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).



*Dear Jesus, I commit my life to purity
and holiness by your power.*





Does the Bible support capital punishment?



“He is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:4).

The Scriptures don’t deal directly with the notion of a secular government’s use of capital punishment. While it’s clear that God places a high value on human life—“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13)—in the theocracy of Old Testament Israel, capital punishment was considered a valid punishment for serious violations of the law. Since we don’t live in a society directly ruled by God today, we must also consider other factors.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that when we seek to “pay back” another person by violence, such an action, which begins in the heart, isn’t acceptable. Retribution, vengeance, hatred, and malice are not to be motivating factors to correct wrongs.

Courts of justice should attempt to rise above the anger of individuals and deal objectively with serious criminal acts. The goal of many countries that practice capital punishment is to protect law-abiding citizens from extremely dangerous individuals. In this way, Romans 13:4 is often quoted by those who favor capital punishment. Here, the apostle Paul addresses the role of secular governments in maintaining order in society, and he goes so far as to say they have a right to “bear the sword.” Many take this to mean that capital punishment is acceptable to God under some circumstances.

Many who are against the death penalty often cite Jesus’ rescue of the prostitute in the temple courts, but this doesn’t speak directly to the role of secular governments exercising certain forms of justice. Still, executing a person is a serious matter—a government killing someone without justice is murder. We should be praying for those prosecutors, judges, and jurors considering such sentences. And we should pray for every person given the death sentence to find Jesus.

Finally, Christians need to be given room to decide for themselves what they believe about the death penalty, and to kindly allow others to view the matter differently. It’s okay to disagree, and one’s belief in this area isn’t a matter of salvation.



Dear Lord, help me to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly every day.



For Further Study: Genesis 9:6; Romans 12:19



Does the Bible say anything about body-piercing or tattoos?

"You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you" (Leviticus 19:28).



Some people are quick to point to the above verse and say, "Does this text *really* speak about body-piercing and tattoo marks that people get today?" Commentaries indicate that the pagan nations around Israel performed all sorts of idolatrous actions. This verse is an example of some of these customs. God basically said, "You are to separate yourselves from these heathen nations."

The Bible teaches us to have a high regard for our bodies as Christians. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). A person who thinks about getting a tattoo or purchasing body-piercing jewelry will ask, "Does this glorify God? Will it improve my witness?"

It's helpful to ask ourselves what motivates us to pierce our bodies with jewelry or get tattoos. Common reasons you hear include, "I want to because my friends are doing it." The Bible doesn't give this as a criterion for good actions. Others say, "I want to look cool." In other words, "I'm not happy with myself or my looks." People who know Jesus loves them do not feel the need to decorate their bodies to be accepted by God or other people.

There are many people who wish they had never gone down this road. Your life changes as you get older. Do you really want an old flame's name forever stamped on your arm or the insignia for some club or music group you no longer associate with to be indelibly engraved in your skin?

Paul warns us, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17). How you treat your body is a serious issue.



Dear Jesus, may my life be a witness for you in whatever I do with my body.





Does the Bible really speak against sex before marriage?



“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’” (Matthew 19:4, 5).

It has always been God's plan that the gift of sexual intimacy be experienced only within the protective confines of a marital union. Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24 to support that the sexual act, described as becoming “one flesh,” is only to be shared between a husband and wife.

There is always an effort to rationalize away Bible truth and look for loopholes, often by young people pressuring their significant others into having pre-marital sex. But defining love by flowing hormones is anything but true love. There is no physical human act more intimate and personal than sex; the bond that is developed from this act of marriage is never meant to be broken.

The Bible teaches, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). You defile the marriage bed by sleeping with someone who is not your spouse. The apostle Paul specifically defines such sin: “Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

Paul becomes even more blatant in describing the act of unmarried people engaging in sex. “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall become one flesh’” (1 Corinthians 6:16). Sex is like spiritual glue that connects two people, a husband and a wife. Marriage safeguards this special bond.

It is not without reason that God wants us to protect this gift. When we look at the broken hearts and bodies of people who believe in recreational sex outside the boundaries of marriage, we see people who struggle with sexually transmitted diseases, abortions, unwed mothers, unwanted pregnancies, and kids growing up with one parent. Abstinence before marriage honors life and can save us from grief.



Dear Jesus, thank you for the gift of intimacy. I commit to always keep myself pure and undefiled for your glory.



For Further Study: Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:28; Romans 13:13



Should Christians vote?

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).



The practice of voting, as we know it today, didn’t exist in Bible times. In Israel the leaders were usually chosen by divine providence. Prophets would be led by God to anoint future kings. Since we no longer live in a theocracy, some Christians believe we should keep our hands completely off of anything that is political. The Bible does not support this point of view.

Christians should recognize the legitimate role of organized governments in society. The apostle Peter gives us some guidelines on this: “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” (1 Peter 2:13–17).

Consider the examples of Bible characters involved in government work. Remember the leadership of Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Mordecai in Medo-Persia. Christians can exert a positive political influence in the world, particularly in the area of guarding religious freedom.

Some people are driven by political parties in their decisions to vote rather than by principle. It would be more in harmony with Scripture to look at issues rather than parties. We should weigh out the issues and choose candidates who might best fulfill moral policies. Even if we are limited in our knowledge about issues, we must prayerfully do our best and leave the rest in God’s hands.

Christ was confronted with an issue over involvement in a secular government that ruled over Palestine. His perceptive response, in the book of Matthew, shows a balance in our responsibility to God and our local governments. And should the two ever come into conflict, the Bible states: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).



*Dear Lord, teach me to be your
representative in all my civil duties.*





Does the Bible speak against interracial marriages?



"There is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all"
(Colossians 3:11).

There is only one incident in the Bible that directly addresses the issue of interracial marriage, and that took place when Miriam and Aaron criticized their brother Moses "because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married" (Numbers 12:1). As a consequence, Miriam became leprous, "as white as snow" (v. 10). Even though she sinned against her brother, Moses pleaded with God to heal his sister. The Lord did heal her, but only after she remained outside the camp for seven days.

There is an issue deeper than skin color or race that is addressed in finding a marital partner. The Bible says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Why is that important? God once told the Israelites to destroy all the people in the land of Canaan and not to intermarry with them because they will "turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:4).

The main factor in a successful marriage is that it is built on a common commitment to follow Jesus Christ. There is no perfect person. Someone once said marriage is not just about finding the right person, but being the right person. When both spouses look to Jesus for guidance, it will help the couple surmount any obstacle.

It is appropriate to reflect on the potential challenges people of different races might face if they choose to get married. While it's not wrong, it could be difficult. Emotional love can make us blind to potential problems. We live in an imperfect world with less than ideal neighbors and communities. Children born into marriages with mixed race parents face prejudices that are deep. This is not true everywhere, but in some societies it can create tough barriers.

What is plain from our text for today is that there is no segregation of races in God's eyes. Salvation is a free gift to all people regardless of their ethnicity.



*Dear Lord, give me wisdom to weigh out differences
in life that matter and those that don't.*



For Further Study: Ruth 1; James 2:1–10

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