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# THE PEOPLE VERSUS THE CLAIMS OF PROSPERITY

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BY: MARK STROUPE

## Preface

This book is not a theological treatise, nor is it a work of doctrinal scholarship in the traditional sense. It is an imaginative exercise—a hypothetical courtroom drama in which the enduring claims of prosperity teachings are placed on trial.

For centuries, promises of blessing, abundance, and provision in Scripture have provoked wonder, devotion, debate, and outright rejection. Theologians, pastors, historians, scholars, and ordinary believers have weighed the evidence—verses of covenant promise alongside warnings against loving money, stories of miraculous provision alongside accounts of faithful suffering—and reached vastly different conclusions. Some see in God's Word a clear invitation to expect material and physical prosperity as a birthright of faith. Others see a call to stewardship, contentment, and eternal treasures, with earthly blessings as tools for His glory, not guarantees of personal gain.

Rather than add yet another voice to the endless chorus of assertion and counter-assertion, I have chosen a different path: to let the primary voices speak for themselves within the structured theater of a trial. Ancient witnesses—patriarchs, kings, apostles, and seekers—are summoned alongside modern scholars, preachers, and critics who have devoted their lives to studying these teachings and their real-world impact. Both prosecution and defense are given full opportunity to present their case.

The reader will notice that no verdict is forced. The judge's final ruling reflects what rigorous inquiry can and cannot establish with certainty. Beyond that threshold lies a question each person must answer alone: not merely “Does God promise prosperity?” but “What does it mean for me?”

My hope is that this dramatic presentation will honor the seriousness of the question while making the arguments accessible and engaging. Whether you approach these pages as a convinced believer in God's abundant provision, a curious skeptic of prosperity claims, or someone standing somewhere in between, I invite you to sit in the jury box, listen carefully to the testimony, and reach your own conclusion.

The trial is called to order.

Mark Stroupe January 2026

## Chapter 1: The Courtroom Awakens

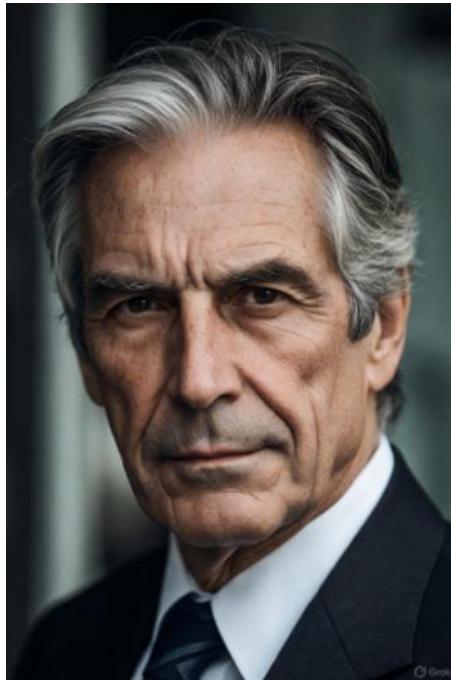
Once upon a time, in a grand and historic courthouse where the sun glinted off stone columns like beacons of unyielding truth, an extraordinary trial unfolded with the weight of eternity hanging in the balance. The building loomed like a sentinel of justice, its flags whipping fiercely in the gusty January wind, as a restless crowd surged outside—historians in rumpled tweed jackets furiously scribbling notes, theologians gripping worn Bibles like lifelines, skeptics with arms crossed in defiant doubt, prosperity preachers with eyes ablaze in fervent hope, and ordinary seekers clutching their last dollar bills as talismans. Reporters jabbed microphones into the fray, cameras flashing like lightning strikes, while a news anchor's voice cut through the chaos: "Today, in this unprecedented hypothetical trial, the claims of biblical prosperity face the ultimate test. Is God obligated to make His people rich and healthy, or is that a distortion of the gospel?"



Inside, the courtroom throbbed with electric anticipation, the air thick with the scent of polished oak and nervous sweat. Polished wooden benches groaned under the shifting weight of observers, their whispers buzzing like a swarm of bees. Sunbeams pierced through towering arched windows,

casting dramatic shafts of light that danced with swirling dust motes, as if ancient spirits had gathered to bear witness. The American flag and state seal stood sentinel beside the elevated judge's bench, where clerks rustled papers with frantic urgency. Suddenly, the bailiff—a colossal figure with a voice like rolling thunder—stepped forward, his boots echoing ominously.

The judge, a sixty-year-old man with silver hair streaked like wisdom's crown and a gaze sharp enough to pierce souls, entered with deliberate, commanding strides. His gavel slammed down with a crack that echoed like a divine decree, instantly silencing the room's murmurs to a breathless hush.



The bailiff's voice boomed with unshakeable authority, vibrating through the chamber: "All rise! The Honorable Judge Elias Thorne presiding in the case of The People versus The Claims of Prosperity."

The courtroom erupted in a chaotic rustle of clothing and scraping feet as everyone surged to attention. The judge ascended the bench like a king claiming his throne, adjusted his glasses with a deliberate flick that betrayed his thoughtful intensity, and seated himself with a nod that commanded obedience.

His voice resonated deep and commanding, sweeping the room like a wave: "Be seated. This is no ordinary proceeding—we plunge into the shadowed annals of Scripture, the turbulent depths of human longing, the unyielding rigors of theology, and the soaring heights of stewardship. No verdict here will chain the world, but it may ignite hearts or shatter illusions. Counsel, are you prepared?"



The prosecutor, a sharp-featured woman in her forties, clad in an impeccably tailored suit that screamed precision, locked eyes with the judge—her piercing gaze slicing through any facade like a scalpel. She nodded firmly, her posture radiating unyielding resolve: "The prosecution is ready, Your Honor."

The defense attorney, a passionate man in his fifties, his tie knotted with fierce tightness, eyes burning like coals of conviction, and a subtle cross pin glinting on his lapel like a badge of faith, stood resolute, his fists clenched at his sides: "The defense is ready, Your Honor."



The judge leaned forward slightly, his presence filling the space: "Proceed with opening statements. Prosecution first."

The prosecutor rose with fluid grace, buttoning her jacket with a sharp snap that echoed like a gauntlet thrown down, and strode to the center—her heels clicking against the marble floor like impending judgments. She faced the judge, her gestures slicing the air with controlled fury, her voice steady at first but building to a passionate crescendo that made the room's air feel heavier.

"Your Honor, shadows of doubt loom large over these extraordinary claims, choking the light of reason. A God who guarantees wealth, health, and success to the faithful? A gospel where poverty and sickness prove lack of faith? We will rip open the contradictions in these teachings—cherry-picked verses twisted to promise luxury, ancient promises to Israel applied as personal entitlements, and a cross that supposedly bought not only forgiveness but private jets and mansions. We will show how this 'prosperity' distorts the atonement, exploits the vulnerable, and ignores the Bible's clear warnings: the love of money as a root of evil, the call to store treasures in heaven, the faithful who suffered loss. This is no harmless hope—it is a false gospel that inverts the message of Christ, who became poor so we might become rich in Him, not in bank accounts."

She paused, letting the words settle like dust after a storm. "The prosecution will prove these claims are not biblical truth, but a dangerous illusion."

The judge nodded gravely. "The defense may proceed."

The defense attorney rose, his cross pin catching the light like a quiet promise. His voice carried the fire of conviction, yet tempered with humility.

"Your Honor, the Scriptures overflow with a God who delights in blessing His people. From Abraham's abundance to Solomon's riches, from promises of provision to the assurance that our Father knows our needs and supplies them—God is generous. We do not claim a blank check for greed, but a covenant Father who prospers His children for His glory, to enable generosity, advance His kingdom, and reflect His goodness. The defense will show that true prosperity is holistic—shalom in body, soul, and community—when we seek first His kingdom. We will answer the warnings with context, the suffering with hope, and the excesses with stewardship. This is no distortion; it is the heartbeat of a loving God."

He turned to the reader (you, the jury), eyes alight. "Let the voices speak."

The judge's gavel tapped once, softly. "The prosecution may call its first witness."

## **Chapter 2: The Prosecution Opens – Modern Voices of Critique and Controversy**

The prosecutor strode forward, her voice crisp and commanding: "The prosecution calls Kate Bowler, historian and author of *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*."



The courtroom doors swung open, and a poised woman in her forties entered, her steps measured and academic, carrying a notebook and a sense of thoughtful introspection. She wore a simple yet professional blouse and skirt, her hair neatly tied back, exuding the quiet confidence of someone who has delved deep into archives and human stories. The bailiff directed her to the stand, where she placed her right hand on a Bible and swore: "I, Kate Bowler, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor began: "Ms. Bowler, please state your credentials for the record."

Bowler spoke clearly, her voice even and reflective: "I am a professor of Christian history at Duke Divinity School, specializing in the study of American religious movements. I have authored several books, including *Blessed*, which examines the history and impact of the prosperity gospel from its roots in the early 20th century to its modern manifestations in megachurches and televangelism."

The prosecutor nodded: "Ms. Bowler, what is your expert assessment of the prosperity gospel's origins and effects?"

Bowler leaned forward slightly, her expression earnest and laced with empathy: "Your Honor, I've spent years tracing this movement's path—from the faith healers and positive thinkers of the New Thought era to the televangelists who popularized it. It promises a 'best life now' through faith confessions, seed giving, and claiming divine favor for wealth and health. But it often distorts Scripture by misapplying Old Testament covenants to modern believers, ignoring the New Testament's emphasis on spiritual riches and endurance through suffering. Followers are drawn in by hope, especially the poor and marginalized, but when promises fail—when sickness lingers or finances falter—they're left blaming their own lack of faith. This theology can exploit vulnerability, turning God into a cosmic vending machine and shifting the gospel's focus from the cross's sacrifice to personal comfort and gain."

The defense attorney rose for cross-examination, his tone respectful but probing: "Ms. Bowler, doesn't the prosperity gospel empower people by encouraging trust in God's goodness, much like biblical promises of blessing?"

Bowler replied thoughtfully, her gaze steady: "It does appeal powerfully, offering agency in a world of uncertainty. But history shows the cost: emotional burdens, financial strain, and a diluted faith. True biblical hope endures trials, as seen in Job or Paul—it doesn't promise to avoid them."

As Bowler stepped down, the courtroom stirred with whispers, her words hanging like a cautionary veil over the proceedings.

The prosecutor continued: "The prosecution calls Joyce Meyer, evangelist, author, and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries."



The doors parted again, and a poised woman in her eighties entered, her steps purposeful and graceful, carrying a well-worn Bible under her arm. She wore a modest yet elegant suit, her hair styled simply, radiating the warmth of someone who has overcome personal trials and shared hope with millions. The bailiff guided her to the stand, where she raised her right hand and swore: "I, Joyce Meyer, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor asked: "Ms. Meyer, please state your credentials."

Meyer answered with a calm, relatable voice: "I am an author of over 100 books, a speaker at conferences worldwide, and the founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, which broadcasts teachings on practical Christian living to millions daily. Through Hand of Hope, our outreach arm, we provide humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and support for the vulnerable globally."

The prosecutor pressed, her tone sharp: "Ms. Meyer, you have long taught on faith leading to blessings, including material provision. Critics associate you with prosperity gospel elements like

positive confession and Word of Faith doctrines. In earlier years, you emphasized that faith could overcome sickness and poverty—did these teachings 'get out of balance'?"

Meyer nodded thoughtfully, her expression reflective and sincere: "Yes, Your Honor. I'm glad for what I learned about prosperity and faith, but it did get out of balance. There was a time when I believed every problem—illness, financial hardship, tragedy—was due to insufficient faith. If someone got sick, I might have said they didn't have enough faith. If calamity struck, it was because faith failed. That was wrong and hurtful. The Bible shows faithful people like Job enduring loss, or Paul with his thorn in the flesh. It promises God's presence and peace in trials, not an exemption from them. I've publicly acknowledged this and shifted my focus to balanced, practical living—trusting God for provision while embracing contentment and stewardship."

The prosecutor delved deeper: "Yet your older teachings included controversial ideas, like believers being 'little gods' or 'god-kind,' drawing from Psalm 82:6, and claims that Jesus suffered in hell to complete the atonement. And your ministry faced scrutiny during the 2007 Senate investigation over compensation, perks, and transparency. How do you address these?"

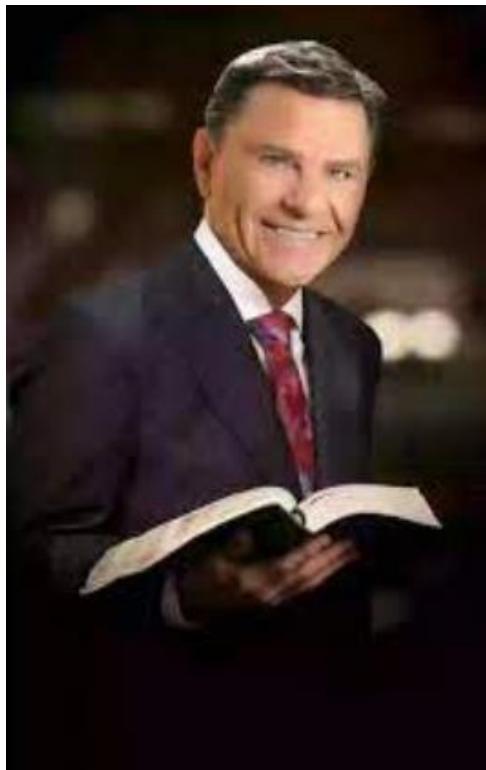
Meyer's voice remained steady, laced with humility: "Those early explorations were part of my growth in the Word of Faith movement, but I've distanced myself from extremes that elevate humans or distort Christ's finished work on the cross. 'It is finished,' as Jesus said in John 19:30. Regarding the investigation, we fully cooperated, implemented reforms, joined the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability for ongoing audits, and now publish annual reports showing 86% of funds going to programs like missions and aid. My net worth comes mostly from book royalties, not ministry salaries, and I donate royalties from certain sales back. The goal is impact—helping people heal from abuse, manage emotions biblically, and live generously—not personal gain."

The defense attorney rose for cross-examination, his eyes kind yet fervent: "Ms. Meyer, your ministry has transformed countless lives through relatable teachings on everyday faith, emotional healing from your own past traumas, and global outreach. Hand of Hope feeds the hungry, rescues trafficking victims, and provides clean water—doesn't this exemplify true prosperity: God's blessings used to bless others and advance His kingdom?"

Meyer smiled faintly, her tone warm and encouraging: "Absolutely. God is a good Father who delights in prospering His servants, as Psalm 35:27 says, but it's for His glory. Matthew 6:33 teaches to seek first His kingdom, and 'all these things'—our needs—will be added. It's not about luxury jets or mansions; it's about trust, contentment in any season, and using provision to love others. I've learned through my own struggles that faith endures trials, building character as Romans 5:3-5 promises. Prosperity, rightly understood, is holistic shalom—peace in spirit, soul, body, and relationships."

As Meyer stepped down, the room felt a subtle shift, her words offering a bridge between critique and hope.

The prosecutor pressed on: "The prosecution calls Kenneth Copeland, evangelist and founder of Kenneth Copeland Ministries."



The doors opened with a creak, and a tall, commanding man in his late eighties strode in, his presence filling the space like a storm cloud, dressed in a tailored suit that spoke of confidence and authority. His eyes were sharp, his step firm, carrying the aura of someone who has preached to

arenas and broadcast to millions. The bailiff led him to the stand, where he placed his hand on the Bible and swore: "I, Kenneth Copeland, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor inquired: "Mr. Copeland, please state your credentials."

Copeland's voice boomed with unshakeable conviction: "I am the founder of Kenneth Copeland Ministries, a global outreach broadcasting the Word of Faith to millions through television, radio, and conventions. I've authored numerous books, taught on faith and prosperity for over 50 years, and seen countless lives changed through God's promises."

The prosecutor leaned in, her gaze piercing: "Mr. Copeland, you are a leading voice in the Word of Faith movement, teaching that faith confessions, positive words, and seed giving unlock material wealth, physical health, and victory as God's covenant right for believers. You have said, 'Words are spiritual containers' that release power, and that prosperity is part of the atonement. Is this accurate?"

Copeland nodded vigorously, his tone fervent and unyielding: "Yes, ma'am! The Bible is a covenant book, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world, as 1 John 5:4 declares. God spoke the universe into existence with words—'Let there be light'—and we're made in His image, so our words carry power too. Proverbs 18:21 says life and death are in the power of the tongue. I teach believers to confess God's promises: 'The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it' (Proverbs 10:22). Jesus took poverty and sickness on the cross so we could have abundance—John 10:10, life more abundantly! Sow seed faith, give generously, and watch the hundredfold return, as Mark 10:30 promises. I've lived it—God has blessed our ministry with resources to reach the nations."

The prosecutor sharpened her line: "Your ministry owns multiple private jets, including a Gulfstream V, and you live in a multimillion-dollar tax-exempt mansion. You defended these by saying commercial flights are 'a long tube with a bunch of demons,' and that private jets are a 'biblical thing' for spreading the gospel. Critics call this extravagant, especially when donors, often the poor, give sacrificially expecting returns. Your net worth is estimated in the hundreds of millions—how do you justify this amid Scripture's warnings against loving money?"

Copeland's eyes flashed with intensity, his voice rising like a sermon: "I'm a very wealthy man, but my wealth comes from God, not man! Natural gas on our properties, wise investments—all from Him. If I flew commercial, I'd have to stop 65% of what I'm doing—preaching to the lost, delivering aid. Demons? The world is full of distractions and spiritual attacks; jets allow focus on God's call. Abraham was rich, Solomon was rich—why should preachers live in poverty? Galatians 3:13 says Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, including poverty. Critics misunderstand: prosperity is for the gospel's sake, to fund missions, Bible schools, and victory living. We've seen blind eyes open, debts canceled—faith works!"

The defense attorney interjected on cross: "Mr. Copeland, your ministry claims to reach millions globally through broadcasts, conventions, and disaster relief. Doesn't this demonstrate prosperity as a means to advance God's kingdom—not just personal gain?"

Copeland pounded the stand lightly, his passion evident: "Absolutely! We've got offices worldwide, training believers to walk in authority. Faith grows when you use it—confess it, believe it, receive it. God delights in prospering His servants to bless others. It's not greed; it's covenant living!"

As Copeland stepped down, the courtroom erupted in murmurs, his unapologetic fervor leaving a charged atmosphere of awe and unease.

### **Chapter 3: The Prosecution Deepens – Ancient Echoes of Suffering and Caution**

The prosecutor turned to the ancient voices, her tone solemn: "The prosecution calls Job, the blameless man from Uz."



The doors creaked open, and a weathered figure entered, his robes tattered from trials, his body bearing scars of affliction, yet his eyes held a depth of unyielding faith. He moved with the slow dignity of one who has wrestled with God and lived. The bailiff administered the oath: "I, Job, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor asked: "Job, please state your credentials or background for the record."

Job's voice was heavy with experience, resonant like distant thunder: "I am Job from the land of Uz, a man who feared God and shunned evil. The Lord Himself called me blameless and upright, one who turned away from wrong. I was the greatest man in the East, with vast wealth, a large family, and honor among my people."

The prosecutor began: "Job, describe your prosperity and how it was stripped away despite your faithfulness."

Job's expression darkened with memory, his words pouring out like a lament: "I had seven sons and three daughters, thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys, and many servants. My house was filled with joy and abundance. But in one dreadful day, raiders stole my livestock, fire from

heaven consumed my sheep, a mighty wind collapsed the house on my children, killing them all. Then boils covered my body from head to toe—I sat in ashes, scraping my skin with broken pottery. My friends accused me: 'Surely your suffering proves hidden sin!' But I cried out, 'I am innocent! Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him' (Job 13:15). The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21). Prosperity vanished, but my faith did not—it was refined in the fire of trial."

The prosecutor followed: "How does this challenge claims that faith guarantees wealth and health?"

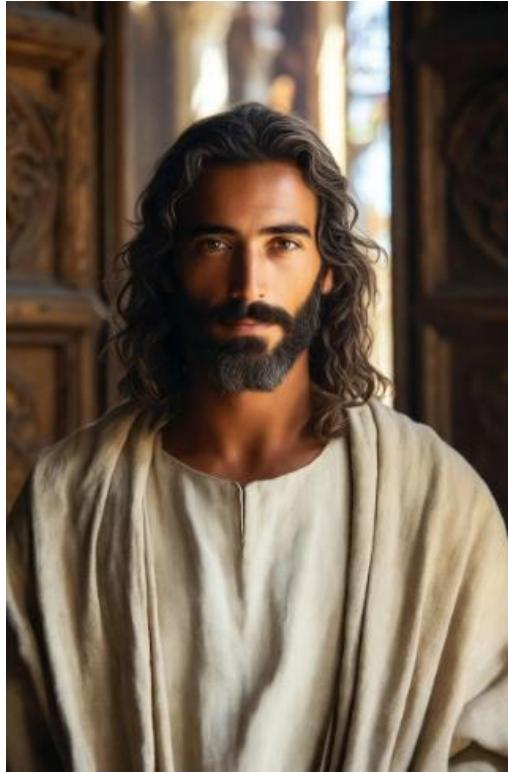
Job leaned forward, his voice gaining strength: "True faith isn't a shield from pain; it's a anchor in the storm. My story shows that the righteous can suffer deeply, not because of weak faith, but for reasons known only to God. He rebuked my friends for their accusations. In the end, He restored me double, but the lesson remains: prosperity is a gift, not a right. Cling to God, not goods."

The defense cross-examined gently: "Job, God did restore your fortunes abundantly—does that not affirm His ultimate blessing for the faithful?"

Job nodded slowly, his tone resolute: "Yes, He gave me twice as much as before—more children, livestock, and years of life. But restoration came after I humbled myself and prayed for my friends. Suffering taught me God's sovereignty; blessing flowed from His mercy, not my demands. Trust Him in lack as in plenty."

As Job departed, the room felt heavier, his scars a silent testimony to endurance.

The prosecutor continued: "The prosecution calls Jesus of Nazareth, the central figure of the faith."



The heavy courtroom doors parted slowly, almost reverently, and a figure entered—simple, unadorned, in plain linen robes that spoke of humility rather than royalty. His presence was quiet yet undeniable, like a calm center in a storm; His eyes held a depth that seemed to see not just the room but every heart within it. No crown, no scepter, no entourage—only the quiet authority of one who had walked dusty roads, touched the untouchable, and spoken words that still echoed across millennia. The bailiff stepped forward and, with the same steady ritual he used for every witness, directed the oath:

"Please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

Jesus placed His hand on the Bible, His voice gentle yet carrying the weight of eternity: "I do."

The prosecutor, for the first time in the trial, softened her tone slightly, as if in instinctive deference, yet her questions remained sharp: "Lord Jesus, please state Your credentials for the record."

Jesus replied, His words simple and direct: "I am Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man and the Son of God, born of Mary in Bethlehem, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised on the third day. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. I taught with authority, healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave My life as a ransom for many."

The prosecutor inquired: "Jesus, what did You teach about wealth, prosperity, and the kingdom of God?"

Jesus spoke with piercing clarity, his words cutting through the air like light through darkness: "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). I became poor for your sakes, so that through My poverty you might become rich—not in earthly coins, but in spiritual inheritance (2 Corinthians 8:9). Do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys (Matthew 6:19-21). You cannot serve God and money—no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24). Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3). Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things—your daily needs—will be added to you (Matthew 6:33)."

The prosecutor followed: "How do these teachings counter claims of guaranteed material prosperity for believers?"

Jesus's gaze swept the room, filled with love and truth: "The Father knows what you need before you ask. But true riches are eternal—forgiveness, peace, the Holy Spirit. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' but I will say, 'I never knew you.' Faith is not a formula for gain; it is surrender to My will, even in suffering. I bore the cross; My followers must take up theirs daily (Luke 9:23). The love of money ensnares; give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

The prosecutor pressed further, her tone careful yet pointed: "Lord, in the same encounter with the rich young ruler, after he went away sad because he had great wealth, You said to Your disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' Many have heard this saying and wondered—does it mean it is literally impossible for a wealthy person to be saved?"

Jesus looked at the prosecutor, then slowly swept His gaze across the counsel tables, the spectators—His eyes filled with both compassion and unflinching truth. When He spoke, His voice was calm, measured, yet carried the piercing clarity that had once silenced storms and demons.

"The saying is not about a gate in a city wall, nor is it a riddle with a hidden trick. There was no such gate in Jerusalem called 'the eye of the needle'—that is a later story, born of human desire to soften the words. I spoke plainly, using the strongest image My hearers would know: the largest animal they knew—a camel—and the smallest opening they could imagine—the eye of an ordinary sewing needle. It is a deliberate exaggeration, a way of teaching that shocks the heart awake. With man alone, it is impossible. A camel cannot pass through a needle's eye, any more than a person who trusts in his riches, clings to his possessions, and makes wealth his god can enter My Father's kingdom. The rich young man walked away because his heart was divided. His treasure was on earth, and his heart followed it. No one can serve two masters—God and money."

He paused, letting the weight settle, then continued, His tone softening with hope: "But listen carefully, for this is the heart of the matter. The disciples heard My words and cried out in despair, 'Then who can be saved?' I answered them immediately: 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' The impossibility is not absolute—it is human impossibility. Salvation is never earned by poverty or lost by wealth. It is the gift of God, received by grace through faith. A rich man can enter the kingdom if he surrenders his riches—not necessarily by selling everything and giving it away as I commanded that young man in his particular moment, but by releasing the grip of wealth on his heart, by trusting in Me rather than in his storehouses. I have dined with tax collectors and sinners, with Zacchaeus who gave half his goods to the poor and repaid fourfold what he had taken. I have received the gifts of wealthy women who supported My ministry. Wealth itself is not the barrier; the love of it is. The heart that clings to possessions cannot cling to Me. But with God, even the most attached heart can be set free."

The prosecutor pressed gently: "So the saying is hyperbole, meant to expose the danger of riches, not to declare salvation impossible for the wealthy?"

Jesus nodded, His gaze steady: "Yes. It is a warning, not a curse. Riches often bring pride, self-sufficiency, distraction. They can choke the word and make it unfruitful. But My Father is able to

do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. He can take a heart bound by gold and make it free. He can cause even the rich to become poor in spirit, and the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

The defense attorney rose, his voice reverent: "Lord, You also said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Yet You fed the multitudes, multiplied loaves and fish, healed the sick—do You not promise provision and blessing to those who follow You?"

Jesus turned to him with a gentle smile: "Yes, My Father is generous. Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find (Matthew 7:7). But blessings are for His glory, not greed. With God, all things are possible—even a rich man entering the kingdom if he surrenders all to Me."

The courtroom fell into a profound silence as Jesus spoke these final words. No one moved; the air itself seemed to hold its breath. Then, with a quiet nod, He stepped down from the stand, His presence lingering long after He had gone.

The judge, for once, did not immediately speak. He simply watched, as though weighing something far greater than the case before him.

The prosecutor, visibly moved, said quietly: "The prosecution has no further questions."

And the trial continued, but something in the room had shifted—forever.

The prosecutor summoned next: "The prosecution calls the Apostle Paul, missionary and author of much of the New Testament."



A man entered, his frame marked by chains and scars from beatings, yet his eyes burned with unquenchable zeal, robes simple and travel-worn. The bailiff swore him in: "I, Paul, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor asked: "Paul, state your credentials."

Paul's voice rang with authority: "I am Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel, but called by Christ on the Damascus road to be an apostle to the Gentiles. I planted churches across the Roman world, wrote letters inspired by the Holy Spirit, and suffered for the gospel's sake."

The prosecutor queried: "Paul, what did you teach about prosperity, suffering, and contentment?"

Paul leaned forward, his tone passionate and instructive: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want (Philippians 4:12). I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10). Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that (1 Timothy 6:7-8). I have

been in want, beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned—yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37). My thorn in the flesh taught me that God's grace is sufficient, His power made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9)."

The prosecutor pressed: "How does this refute ideas that faith guarantees wealth and health?"

Paul's voice rose with urgency: "The gospel is not a path to earthly riches but to eternal life. Christ Jesus became poor though He was rich, so that by His poverty you might become rich—in grace, redemption, the Spirit. Those who peddle the Word for profit are false teachers (2 Corinthians 2:17). Endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3). All who desire to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Rejoice in trials, for they produce perseverance, character, hope (Romans 5:3-5)."

The defense cross-examined: "Paul, you also wrote that God supplies all our needs according to His riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). Does He not bless generously?"

Paul affirmed: "Yes—He is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). Give cheerfully, and God will enrich you to be generous. But blessing is for His purposes, not our greed. I labored with my hands to support myself, lest I burden anyone (1 Thessalonians 2:9)."

As Paul departed, his chains seemed to symbolize the cost of true faith.

Finally, the prosecutor called: "The prosecution calls the Rich Young Ruler, a seeker from the Gospels."



A young man entered, finely robed in silks that spoke of wealth and status, his face handsome but etched with eternal sorrow, his steps hesitant as if reliving a pivotal moment. The bailiff swore him in: "I, the Rich Young Ruler, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The prosecutor asked: "Please state your background."

The young man's voice was soft, tinged with regret: "I was a ruler among my people, likely in a synagogue, young and wealthy, with great possessions inherited and earned. I kept the commandments from my youth, striving for righteousness."

The prosecutor inquired: "Describe your encounter with Jesus and its outcome."

The young man bowed his head, his words heavy with emotion: "I came to the Teacher running, fell on my knees, and asked, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (Mark 10:17). He listed the commandments—do not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, defraud, honor your parents. I replied, 'All these I have kept since I was a boy.' Jesus looked at me and loved me, then said, 'One thing you lack: Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and

you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me' (Mark 10:21). At this, my face fell. I went away sad, because I had great wealth. My possessions owned me—I couldn't let go. Jesus turned to His disciples: 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:23-25). They were amazed: 'Who then can be saved?' He replied, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God' (Mark 10:26-27)."

The prosecutor emphasized: "How does your story warn against viewing prosperity as a sign of favor or entitlement?"

The young man's voice trembled: "I thought my wealth proved God's blessing, my obedience a ticket to life. But Jesus exposed my idol—riches had become my master. No one can serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). True life requires surrender, not accumulation. I chose wrongly, and sorrow has followed me ever since."

The defense cross-examined: "Yet Jesus said 'with God all things are possible.' Could wealth not be used for good if surrendered?"

The young man sighed: "Perhaps, if the heart releases its grip. For me, it was a barrier. Many are ensnared by what they possess, missing the kingdom's call."

As the Rich Young Ruler stepped down, his sorrowful figure lingered in the minds of all, a tragic echo of choice and loss. The prosecution rested.

#### **Chapter 4: The Defense Responds – Voices of Blessing and Stewardship**

The defense attorney stood, his voice steady: "The defense calls Randy Alcorn, author and founder of Eternal Perspective Ministries."



The doors opened, and a thoughtful man in his seventies entered, his steps calm and unassuming, carrying a Bible and notes, dressed in a simple sweater and slacks that reflected humility. His face bore the lines of deep study and quiet conviction. The bailiff swore him in: "I, Randy Alcorn, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The defense asked: "Mr. Alcorn, please state your credentials."

Alcorn replied evenly, his tone warm and scholarly: "I am the author of over 60 books, including *The Treasure Principle* and *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, focusing on biblical stewardship and eternal perspective. I founded Eternal Perspective Ministries to teach on using resources for God's kingdom."

The defense inquired: "Mr. Alcorn, what is your view on biblical prosperity and blessing?"

Alcorn spoke with clarity, his words grounded in Scripture: "Your Honor, God is the ultimate Owner; we are managers. 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1). He provides generously, but not for self-indulgence. Jesus promised, 'Seek first His kingdom and His

righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Matthew 6:33)—'these things' are daily needs, not extravagance. God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving (2 Corinthians 9:10-11). True prosperity is eternal investment: giving breaks materialism's hold, brings joy, and stores treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy (Matthew 6:19-21). I've seen families transformed by cheerful generosity, funding missions and helping the poor—not by demanding wealth, but by trusting the Provider who supplies all needs according to His riches in glory (Philippians 4:19)."

The defense followed: "How does this differ from distorted prosperity claims?"

Alcorn's voice grew firm: "Prosperity gospel twists giving into a get-rich scheme—'seed faith' for personal gain. That's false; it's from the pit. Scripture warns against greed, as Paul endured want yet found contentment. Blessing is for God's glory, to abound in good works, not luxury."

The prosecutor cross-examined: "You affirm provision yet critique the movement. Isn't affirming any 'blessing' a slippery slope to excess?"

Alcorn responded thoughtfully: "No—the key is perspective. Eyes on eternity avoid the slope. Hoarding robs joy; giving unleashes it. God enriches us to be generous on every occasion (2 Corinthians 9:11)."

As Alcorn departed, his words offered a grounded hope.

The defense re-called Joyce Meyer for positive emphasis.

Meyer returned to the stand, her presence familiar and reassuring.

The defense: "Ms. Meyer, building on your earlier testimony, how has your ministry demonstrated balanced prosperity through stewardship and outreach?"

Meyer answered with passion: "Our focus is real-life application—healing from trauma, as I did from abuse, and living victoriously through Christ. Hand of Hope has drilled wells for clean water, fed millions in disasters, rescued trafficking victims. This is prosperity in action: God providing resources to meet needs and share His love. 3 John 1:2 wishes us to prosper as our souls prosper—

holistic, not just financial. I've learned faith isn't a formula; it's relationship. In trials, like Paul's, we grow. Give cheerfully, not under compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7), and God multiplies for His kingdom."

The prosecutor cross-examined briefly: "But past imbalances remain in your legacy—how do you ensure followers don't misapply?"

Meyer: "Through teaching context and balance now. The Bible is clear: contentment in all things."

Meyer stepped down again, her testimony a testament to growth.

The defense summoned Abraham.



A patriarch entered, robes flowing, staff in hand, his face etched with the lines of faith's journey. The bailiff swore him in: "I, Abraham, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The defense: "Abraham, state your background."

Abraham's voice was steady, ancient yet vibrant: "I am Abraham, formerly Abram of Ur, called by God to leave my homeland. Father of many nations, through whom all families of the earth are blessed."

The defense: "What did God promise you regarding prosperity?"

Abraham recounted: "The Lord said, 'Go from your country... to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:1-3). He made me exceedingly prosperous—flocks, herds, silver, gold, servants (Genesis 13:2). Even in famine, He provided. Deuteronomy 8:18 echoes: God gives the ability to produce wealth to confirm His covenant. My blessing was not for hoarding but for being a conduit to nations."

The prosecutor cross-examined: "Your wealth served God's purposes—did it not bring trials, like conflict with Lot?"

Abraham: "Yes, abundance requires wisdom. But God's promise held: faith in Him brings provision for His plans."

As Abraham left, his legacy loomed large.

The defense called Solomon.



A king entered, crowned in splendor, robes of royal purple, his bearing wise and regal. The bailiff swore him in: "I, Solomon, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The defense: "Solomon, your credentials?"

Solomon's voice was rich with wisdom: "I am Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, builder of the temple, author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. God granted me unparalleled wisdom, riches, and honor."

The defense: "What did God teach you about prosperity?"

Solomon proclaimed: "The Lord appeared to me: 'Ask for whatever you want' (1 Kings 3:5). I sought wisdom to govern His people. He replied, 'Since you asked for this... I will give you a wise heart... Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings' (1 Kings 3:11-13). Gold and silver flowed like common stones; queens and kings brought tribute (1 Kings 10:21-23). 'The blessing of the

Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it' (Proverbs 10:22). Yet I learned: delight in the Lord, and He gives desires of the heart (Psalm 37:4)—but apart from Him, all is vanity."

The prosecutor: "You warned against riches' folly in Ecclesiastes—did wealth not lead to your downfall?"

Solomon: "Yes, I turned to idols; wealth tested my heart. But true blessing is wisdom from God, using abundance for His house and justice."

Solomon's exit evoked reflections on wisdom's price.

Finally, the defense called King David.



A warrior-poet entered, harp slung over his shoulder, armor-scarred yet crowned, his eyes alive with passion for God. The bailiff swore him in: "I, David, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The defense: "David, your background?"

David's voice sang with fervor: "I am David, son of Jesse, shepherd boy anointed king, slayer of Goliath, psalmist of Israel, man after God's own heart."

The defense: "What did you experience of God's prosperity?"

David declared: "The Lord was my shepherd; I lacked nothing (Psalm 23:1). From pastures to palace, He gave victory over enemies, expanded my kingdom, filled my treasuries with gold and silver. Yet my heart overflowed: 'Who am I, Lord, that You have brought me this far?' (2 Samuel 7:18). I prepared for the temple with all my might—100,000 talents of gold, a million of silver, bronze and iron beyond weighing (1 Chronicles 29:2-4). 'Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart' (Psalm 37:4). 'Let them shout for joy who favor my righteous cause; let them say continually, "The Lord be magnified, who delights in the prosperity of His servant'" (Psalm 35:27). True blessing is poured out for His glory."

The prosecutor: "You sinned with Bathsheba, lost a child, faced rebellion—did prosperity shield you?"

David bowed: "No. Sin brought sword to my house. But when I repented, 'Create in me a clean heart' (Psalm 51:10), God restored joy. Prosperity humbles the wise."

As David stepped down, strumming a silent harp, the defense rested on worship's triumph.

## **Chapter 5: Closing Arguments and the Open Question**

The courtroom had grown hushed, the echoes of ancient voices and modern confessions hanging in the air like incense. The sun had shifted low, casting long golden shafts across the polished floor, as if time itself paused to listen. Every face in the gallery—believers with Bibles clutched tight, skeptics with arms folded, seekers with eyes wide—remained fixed on the counsel tables. The trial had journeyed through history, Scripture, and human hearts. Now came the moment when the advocates would gather all that had been said, weave it into a final, unbreakable thread, and lay it before the one true jury: you, the reader.

The judge leaned forward, his silver hair catching the dying light, his gaze steady and profound. His voice, when he spoke, carried the weight of all that had transpired.

"Counsel for the prosecution may present closing argument."

The prosecutor rose slowly, her tailored suit softened by the gravity of the hour. She stepped to the center of the well, first turning slightly to the bench.

"Your Honor..."

Then she faced outward, as if speaking to every heart present, her voice beginning low, almost a whisper, then rising like a gathering storm.

"You who have sat through every testimony, weighed every word—look around this room. Look at the faces that have spoken here today. A scholar who has traced a teaching born of hope but shadowed by disappointment. A preacher who once proclaimed formulas of faith and wealth, only to confess imbalance and regret. A televangelist who defends jets and mansions while the poor give their last coins. And then the ancients: Job in ashes, blessing the Lord who took away; Jesus with no place to lay His head; Paul content in hunger and plenty; the Rich Young Ruler walking away in sorrow, chained by what he could not release.

"These are not isolated voices. They form a chorus that has sounded across centuries. The prosperity gospel promises a crown without a cross, abundance without sacrifice, victory without the valley. It takes ancient covenants given to Israel and turns them into personal bank accounts. It takes the atonement—the blood of Christ poured out for sin—and claims it buys not only forgiveness but private planes and pain-free lives. It brushes aside the warnings: 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,' 'you cannot serve God and money,' 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.'

"But the voices refuse to be silenced. They remind us that faith is not a transaction. It is surrender. It is trust in a God who may give riches or take them away, who may heal or leave the thorn, who calls us to store treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy. The promise is not that God will make you rich. The promise is that He will make you His. And in that promise alone is everything you truly need.

"Do not be deceived. Weigh the evidence. See the cost. And choose wisely."

She stood a moment longer, her eyes sweeping outward as if meeting yours directly, then returned to her seat in profound silence.

The judge turned to the defense. "Counsel for the defense may present closing argument."

The defense attorney rose, his tie still knotted fiercely, his cross pin catching the last shaft of sunlight like a beacon. He first addressed the bench with respect.

"Your Honor..."

Then he stepped forward, his voice igniting with fire, as if speaking to a congregation rather than an empty room.

"And you—those who have listened with open hearts—hear what this courtroom has truly revealed.

"A scholar spoke of history, but beneath it was a God who has always been generous. A preacher admitted past imbalance, but her life has poured out in aid, in healing, in reaching the broken. A man defended his jets, but at the core was a cry to reach the lost—because the gospel must go forward.

"And then the ancients came. Abraham, called from nothing to receive everything, blessed to be a blessing. Solomon, given wisdom and wealth beyond measure, declaring that the blessing of the Lord makes rich and adds no sorrow. David, shepherd boy to king, whose treasures overflowed yet whose heart cried, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?' He poured gold and silver into the house of God, delighting in the prosperity of His servant.

"These are not myths. These are testimonies of a God who delights in blessing His people—not for their sake alone, but for His glory, for the advancement of His kingdom, for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the naked, the sending of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

"The prosecution speaks of distortion. But what has been distorted is the very heart of our Father. He is not a stingy taskmaster who withholds unless we perform. He is a generous King who invites us to seek first His kingdom, knowing that all other things will be added. He does not promise a

life without trials—Job and Paul remind us of that—but He promises His presence in them, His provision through them, His purpose beyond them.

"The gospel is not poverty or prosperity. It is Christ—crucified, risen, reigning. And in Him we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Yet Scripture does not shy away from material blessing: it celebrates it when it flows from obedience, generosity, and trust. It warns against loving money, yes—but it also invites us to trust the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

"So I ask you: Do not choose between grace and generosity. Choose the God who gives both. Do not settle for a gospel stripped of joy. Embrace the fullness of a Father who delights to prosper His children so they can prosper the world.

"The evidence is before you. The voices have spoken. Now the question rests with you alone."

The defense attorney stood a moment longer, his eyes seeming to reach through the pages directly to you, then slowly returned to his seat. The courtroom was utterly silent—no whispers, no shifting, only the soft creak of old wood and the beating of hearts.

The judge waited, letting the silence linger like a prayer. Then, his voice deep and measured, he spoke:

"You who have heard these voices—modern and ancient, warning and promise, sorrow and joy—you have weighed the claims of prosperity against the full counsel of Scripture. No verdict will be forced here. The ruling of this court is simple: the evidence has been presented, the arguments made. What remains is yours alone to decide—not merely 'Is prosperity promised?' but 'What does this mean for me?'

"Court is adjourned."

The gavel fell, soft but final.

## **Epilogue: The Question That Remains**

The crowd filed out slowly, some in quiet conversation, others in deep thought. The courtroom emptied, the sun sank lower, and the great doors closed behind the last observer.

Yet one seat remained occupied—not in the gallery, not at the counsel tables, but in the quiet of your own heart. You, the reader, have sat in the jury box from the first page. You have heard the historian's careful analysis, the preacher's honest reflection, the televangelist's bold defense. You have listened to Job's lament, Jesus' piercing words, Paul's hard-won contentment, the Rich Young Ruler's sorrowful footsteps. You have weighed Abraham's covenant blessing, Solomon's unparalleled riches, David's poured-out worship.

The trial is over. No judge will declare a winner. No verdict will be read aloud. The question is not for this courtroom to answer.

It is yours alone.

Does God promise prosperity? Or is the greater promise something deeper—grace that sustains in lack, joy that overflows in giving, a kingdom that cannot be shaken?

What does it mean for you?

The gavel has fallen. The voices are silent. Now the deliberation begins—in the stillness of your soul.

Mark Stroupe January 2026

## Witness List and Testimony Summary

### Prosecution Witnesses

1. **Kate Bowler** – Historian and author of *Blessed*. Sets the modern stage by tracing the prosperity gospel's origins, appeal, and human costs.
2. **Joyce Meyer** – Evangelist and ministry leader (hostile witness). Shows the spectrum of teaching: past associations with Word of Faith ideas, public admission of imbalance, and reformed focus on practical faith and stewardship.
3. **Kenneth Copeland** – Televangelist and Word of Faith leader. Embodies the hard-line extreme: bold confessions for wealth/health, defense of lavish assets (jets, mansions) as ministry tools.
4. **Job** – The blameless sufferer from Uz. Testifies to catastrophic loss of wealth, family, and health despite righteousness, showing suffering is not always tied to lack of faith.
5. **Jesus of Nazareth** – The Messiah and central figure of Christianity. Delivers direct teachings on wealth (no place to lay His head, camel through needle's eye, treasures in heaven), counters material guarantees with spiritual riches, and clarifies the "eye of the needle" as hyperbole emphasizing human impossibility without God's grace.
6. **The Apostle Paul** – Missionary and New Testament author. Speaks of contentment in plenty or want, warns against the love of money, and highlights grace over self-reliance.
7. **The Rich Young Ruler** – The young seeker from the Gospels. Provides tragic climax: walks away sorrowful when called to sell all and follow, illustrating wealth as a potential barrier to the kingdom.

### Defense Witnesses

1. **Randy Alcorn** – Author and stewardship expert (*The Treasure Principle*). Opens with a balanced, biblical defense: God provides abundantly for generous giving and kingdom advance, not personal indulgence.
2. **Joyce Meyer** (re-called positively) – Emphasizes transparency reforms, global outreach (Hand of Hope), and holistic prosperity (shalom through trust and generosity).

3. **Abraham** – Patriarch of the covenant. Testifies to God's promise of blessing (great nation, wealth, being a blessing to all nations).
4. **Solomon** – Wisest king of Israel. Declares unparalleled riches as God's gift, with the blessing of the Lord making rich without sorrow.
5. **King David** – Warrior-poet-king and man after God's heart. Closes with triumphant humility: abundance poured into worship, delighting in the prosperity of God's servant.