

The
Q & A Book
Questions & Answers

All Scriptural quotations were taken from the New King James Version except as noted.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years we have received literally thousands of questions on various biblical topics from our readers and viewers. In the past, we have addressed many of these questions in our various periodicals. Unfortunately, those new to our program and literature usually do not have access to the many questions and answers we have published in past years. For this reason, we have compiled, edited, and revised a fair number of the questions and answers we have published, and are now presenting them in this volume.

We have observed that new readers and viewers, once they have had time to compare

our beliefs with the teachings of their own Bibles, often ask the same questions-or variations of the same questions-that many before them have asked. It is our hope that this booklet will help new students of the Bible to find answers to their questions more quickly.

You will notice that the questions are organized under eleven categories.

Some of the categories overlap with others. For instance, the section on the law overlaps somewhat with the section on the Sabbath and festivals, and the section on prophecy overlaps with the section on "last things." The latter deals primarily with concepts regarding heaven, the soul, the afterlife, and the resurrection, while the former deals mostly with properly understanding prophetic texts.

The questions are representative of the many questions we receive by way of the regular mail, e-mail, and telephone calls. Most of them have been reworded and condensed for the sake of clarity.

We hope you find this volume helpful to you as you continue your study of God's Word.

1. MYSTERIES OF GENESIS

Q *The book of Genesis says that God made the light on the first day of creation. Yet, a few verses later, we are told that God made the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day of creation. Is this not a clear contradiction?*

A There is no contradiction in the Genesis account. Genesis 1:1 tells us that God created the universe. Then, in the next verse, we are told that the earth was "without form, and void," meaning that the planet's environment was not suitable for life. The land that would later provide a place for human and animal life to flourish was completely covered with water, and the atmosphere did not allow light to reach the surface of the planet. We are not told how long this condition lasted; nor are we told whether the earth was created in such condition or became that way. The term translated was in "was without form" can also mean became, so it is possible that the earth became a watery wilderness unsuitable for life at some point-perhaps billions of years-after the heavens and the earth were created.

Since the heavens and the earth were created in the beginning, we may logically assume that the sun, moon, and stars existed during the time the earth was covered with water and darkness, and may have existed billions of years before the earth became that way. The lifeless condition may have been due to a collision with a huge asteroid, or possibly several asteroids, resulting in massive flooding and global darkness due to billions of tons of debris being hurled into the atmosphere.

Genesis 1:3 states, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." This

verse does not say that God created light on the first day. It simply tells us that God caused light to shine where darkness had previously been. In other words, the atmosphere was transformed from opaque to translucent. Light could now reach the planet's surface.

On the fourth day of creation, "God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so" (verses 14,15). Since the sun, moon, and stars were created in the beginning, we may logically assume that this passage refers to yet another atmospheric change, allowing the lights of the firmament to be clearly visible from the earth. The translucent atmosphere now becomes transparent.

Verse 16 tells us that "God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also." This verse does not necessarily mean that God made these lights on the fourth day; rather, it emphasizes that it was God who made them. The great luminaries that rule the day and night were worshiped by primitive societies, but the Genesis account informs us that the great lights have a Maker-and only He is to be worshiped.

On the fourth day, God caused the translucent atmosphere to become transparent, thus enabling the heavenly bodies to serve as indicators and regulators for the division of time, and to provide additional light for the earth. God had the arrival of a new species in view when He made all these changes. This new creature would have the capacity to recognize the relationship between the heavenly bodies and the earth's seasonal cycle, and would have mental abilities far greater than any other creature. We read of him in Genesis 1:26-28:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Q *Genesis 4:17 mentions Cain's wife. Where did she come from? Were there humans other than those who came from Adam and Eve?*

A All the families of the earth originated with Adam and Eve. Therefore, Cain's wife was either a sister, niece, or great niece. While laws against marriages between close relatives would later be put in place, such marriages were necessary in the early years of man's existence.

Some read the Genesis account and are left with the impression that Cain, Abel, and Seth were the only children Adam and Eve had, but Genesis 5:4 says plainly that Adam "had sons and daughters." No doubt, Cain's wife was one of Adam's daughters or granddaughters.

Q *Genesis 6:19,20 and Genesis 7:2,3 tell us that Noah was to admit pairs of all kinds of animals, and seven each of “clean” animals and birds, aboard the ark. That’s a lot of animals! How did Noah get so many animals on the ark?*

A According to *The Genesis Flood*, by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, the ark was 437.5 feet in length, 72.92 feet in width, and 43.75 feet in height. These figures are based on the assumption that a cubit equals 17.5 inches (cf. Genesis 6:14-16). With three decks, the ark had enough room to carry at least 125,000 sheep-sized animals.

Whitcomb and Morris estimate that less than 17,600 animals would have needed the protection provided by the ark. By multiplying that number by two and adding the estimated number of clean animals, the ark would have to house approximately 79,000 animals. That’s 46,000 fewer than the estimated maximum number. Given the probability that Noah brought young animals aboard the ark (cubs rather than full-grown lions and bears, for example), and the fact that the average animal was no larger than a sheep, it becomes clear that the ark had sufficient room for the animals as well as sufficient food-storage areas and living quarters for Noah and his family.

Q *Who are the “sons of God” and “daughters of men” mentioned in Genesis 6? Did evil angels marry human females?*

A The theory that the “sons of God” are fallen angels is based, at least in part, on scriptural references to angels as “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7, for example). However, Jesus’s assertion that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:30) exposes the theory as false.

In Luke 3:38, Adam is called a “son of God.” Genesis 5:1-3 states, “In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”

Adam, made in the image and likeness of God, is a son of God. Seth, bearing the image and likeness of Adam, would also be a son of God. Apparently, this image and likeness of God refers to Godly character more than any physical characteristic. This seems to be suggested in the fact that it was Seth’s descendants who “began to call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26). Seth’s line, contrasted with Cain’s line, sought fellowship with God (compare Genesis 4:16-24 with Genesis 5), as indicated by comparing Enoch, who “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22), with Lamach, who followed the murderous ways of his father Cain (Genesis 4:23,24).

We need not assume that the phrase “sons of God” always refers to angels. In Isaiah 43:6,7, God calls those who are called by His name His sons and daughters. In the New Testament, human followers of Christ are called “sons of God” and “children of God” (Romans 8:14,16, for example). It makes sense, then, to conclude that the God-fearing men of the line of Seth were the “sons of God” of Genesis 6. The “daughters of men,” then, would be the daughters of men—from the line of Cain—who did not fear God. Marriages

between these two lines corrupted the worship of God and resulted in increased violence and ungodliness in the earth.

Some have argued that the “giants” of Genesis 6:4 were super-beings that resulted from unnatural unions between evil angels and women. However, the term translated “giants” can refer to extraordinarily large men or to power-wielding monarchs. We are not told whether these “giants” were the progeny of the sons of God and daughters of men, or whether they were physical or political giants. We are told that they were on the earth both “in those days, and also afterward.” As the “mighty men who were of old, men of renown,” it appears that they were powerful monarchs whose unrighteous influence contributed to the spread of wickedness upon the earth.

2. GOD, JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Q *I believe there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead: God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit. Am I right or wrong about this?*

A The Father is clearly presented as God in the Scriptures. No one doubts this. He is distinct from the Son, who is also God. The two divine Persons comprise the one Godhead. The Holy Spirit, however, is not presented in Scripture as a third and distinct Person of the Godhead. The Spirit is personified on occasion, but is generally described as the power and presence of the transcendent God in the natural world.

David said, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalm 139:7). Here, “Your Spirit” is synonymous with “Your presence,” showing that the Spirit of God is the spiritual presence of the supernatural God in the natural world.

Speaking of the conception and birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Here, “Holy Spirit” is synonymous with “power of the Highest,” showing that the Spirit of God is the power of God.

A comparison of the parallel accounts of Luke 11:19,20 and Matthew 12:28 shows that “Spirit of God” is synonymous with “finger of God.” This describes God’s “reaching down” and “touching” the lives of human beings. It is simply another way of describing the presence and activity of the invisible God in the natural world. The description of the Spirit as the “finger of God” does not fit the belief that the Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead.

Many point to John 14-16, where Jesus describes the Spirit as “another Helper” (or “Comforter”) having personal attributes. However, this description is consistent with Jewish

and biblical metaphors for the divine attributes-the personification of “Wisdom,” for example (see Proverbs 8). Further, this section of John’s Gospel is filled with metaphorical descriptions. Jesus Himself said it clearly: “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language...” (John 16:25).

The many passages that mention the Father and the Son, but make no reference to the Spirit, reflect the New Testament writers’ view of the Holy Spirit. Check Matthew 11:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2,3; Galatians 1:3,4; Ephesians 1:2,3; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; James 1:1; 1 John 1:3; 2:24; 5:20; 2 John 1:3,9; Jude 1:1; Revelation 21:22,23; 22:3.

Q *If there are only two Persons in the Godhead (the Father and the Son), how can one be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?*

A Jesus said to His disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and in earth. 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20).

The expression “in [eis, “into”] the name of” denotes “in recognition of the authority of (sometimes combined with the thought of relying or resting on)” (W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 772). Baptism is performed in recognition of the Father’s authority, which is administered through the mediatorship of the Son and confirmed by the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mentioned together does not prove that all three are in precisely the same category. Paul speaks of “God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21), and no one would argue that the angels belong to the same category as God the Father and Christ the Son. Similarly, the fact that the Holy Spirit is mentioned along with the Father and the Son does not mean that the Spirit is the third Person of a triune Godhead.

Since the expression Holy Spirit is consistently used in reference to the presence and power of the transcendent God in the natural world, it is not surprising that Jesus Christ, who has been given authority in heaven and earth (the natural and supernatural worlds), should mention the Holy Spirit in this context. In heaven, the Father gives power to the Son. On earth, the expression of that power is called the “Holy Spirit,” “Spirit of God,” or “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9-11). It is the presence and power of God, both the Father and the Son.

Q *How do you explain Isaiah 45:5 when your belief is that God is a Family?*

A Isaiah 45:5 states, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me." This passage tells us there is but one God-that is, one "Godhead," or "God Family"-but does not address the question of whether the Godhead is comprised of more than one Person. Other passages show that both the Father and the Son may be addressed with all the divine names and titles. Therefore, both are God. The two divine Persons comprise the one Godhead.

There are many Old Testament passages asserting that there is no God besides the one God. All such statements are made in view of the many "gods" acknowledged and worshiped by the nations. By saying, "There is no God besides Me," God is saying that the so-called "gods" the heathen worship are false deities. He is not saying that the Deity (the Godhead) is restricted to only one divine Person.

Q *The Bible says there is only one God. Yet, you speak of the Father and the Son as the "two Persons of the Godhead." Doesn't this suggest more than one God?*

A Both the Old Testament and the New clearly state that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:39; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; James 2:19). However, this does not necessarily mean that the one Deity (or Godhead) is limited to one Person.

The Father is called "God" throughout the New Testament. Christ is called "God" in only a few passages (see John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13,14; Hebrews 1:8), but some scholars question the translation and/or meaning of some of these passages. Nevertheless, the deity of Christ is clearly seen in the fact that He is worshiped (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:13), prayed to (Acts 7:59), and given titles denoting divinity (John 4:42; cf. Hosea 13:4; Revelation 1:17; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).

The unity and plurality of God can be understood by recognizing the difference between essence and persons.

Consider the following: (1) God is Spirit (John 4:24). Spirit, therefore, is the essence of God. It is what God is. (2) There is only one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4). (3) Therefore, God, who is Spirit, is one in essence.

Our conclusion, then, is that when the Bible says that God is one, it means that the Deity is one in essence-that is, one Spirit, one divine nature.

Now, consider further: (1) The Father is God, and is personally distinct from the Son. (2) The Son is God, and is personally distinct from the Father. (3) Therefore, God is more than one in Person.

When we put all these facts together, we can come to only one conclusion: The Deity, or Godhead, is one in essence but more than one in Person. In our tradition, we have used a simple description that we believe adequately and appropriately conveys an understanding of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. We have spoken of this composite unity as a Family, since "family" can be defined as "any class of like or related things." Since the Father is not the Son, but is like the Son in that the two Persons share the divine nature, they may be described as a "Family."

One way of understanding both the unity and plurality of God is through comparing the Divinity with Humanity. Originally, Humanity consisted of Adam and Eve. There was only one Humanity, but the one Humanity was comprised of two distinct persons. As God

is one in essence but more than one in Person, so Humanity was “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), but more than one person.

The Bible even speaks of Humanity as if “he” were an individual person. Speaking of the human race, God says, “Man...is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3). God “saw the wickedness of man...and that the intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (verse 5). Similarly, God is called “He” and “Him,” and is often described as an individual Person. But Scripture reveals that the one God is more than one in Person.

Of course, this analogy breaks down at some point because of the limitations of comparing flesh with Spirit. Nevertheless, it should help satisfy our need to understand how God can be one yet more than one.

When a Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus about the places of worship for her people and His, He informed her that true worship is not restricted to a place. He said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). He simply meant that God, because He is Spirit and therefore not limited to a particular place, can be worshiped anyplace. Jesus’s emphasis is on how to worship God, not where to worship Him.

Jesus was applying to the worship of God what the Old Testament had already revealed about Him. Since God is omnipresent, meaning that there is no place inaccessible to Him, true worshipers can experience His presence at any time and in any place.

David said, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell [sheol, or “the pit”], behold, You are there” (Psalm 139:7,8).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says, “Am I a God near at hand...and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him? ... Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:23,24).

When Solomon offered a prayer of dedication of the Temple, he said, “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (2 Chronicles 6:18).

The apostle Paul acknowledged God’s omnipresence. He said that “He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being,” and that “we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (Acts 17:27-29).

Believers in China, Australia, Europe, Canada, Jamaica, the Philippines, and the United States can fellowship with God through His Spirit at precisely the same time; and, as Paul points out, there is “one body [one universal church] and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4). The Father and the Son share the one Spirit, the one divine nature, that is not limited by time and space. The one Spirit is called both the “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9). “Christ in you” is synonymous with the indwelling of “the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead” (verses 10,11). As Paul says, “the Lord [referring to Yahweh] is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17). The divine name (Yahweh) may be used in reference to either the Father or the Son, or to the composite unity we often call “the Godhead.”

The Bible is clear; there is one essence-one divine nature, one Spirit-but there is more than one divine Person. This omnipresent Spirit is what we call “the Godhead,” or

“the Deity.” It was the Second Person of the Godhead who became Jesus Christ. This grand truth is expressed beautifully in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel: “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.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1-3,14).

Q *I fully believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I am confused with one question here though. Are we to worship Jesus Christ, when God states in the Old Testament to only worship Him?*

A The Bible clearly teaches that only God is to be worshiped. But it is a mistake to assume that the term God is restricted to the Father only. John 1:1 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This same “Word,” we are told, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). The Word was none other than Jesus Christ. He was with God (the Father), and He was God. The one Godhead consists of two divine Persons, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

John’s Gospel is not alone in declaring the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Synoptic Gospels-Matthew, Mark, and Luke-inform us that Christ is greater than the Temple (Matthew 12:6), is Lord of the Sabbath day (verse 8), has power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5,10), has power to baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8), is the ultimate Judge of the wicked (Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 3:17), and accepts worship (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 28:9,17).

We can come to only one logical conclusion: Jesus Christ is truly God! He is therefore worthy of our worship.

Q *In one of your articles you state that God has been here on the earth and appeared to men. Yet, the Bible plainly states that no man can see God and live. Are you not calling God a liar?*

A No, we are not calling God a liar. When God told Moses that “no man shall see Me, and live” (Exodus 33:20), He was saying that humans cannot see God for all that He is. It is simply not possible. However, God is fully capable of appearing in a form that can be seen by humans. In fact, God made many appearances in Old Testament times. Let’s consider just one of them:

“Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11).

Now, did the nobles of Israel see God, or not? This passage says they did! Of course, we know from other scriptures that they could not have seen God in His full glory, but the text plainly says that they saw God! He presented Himself to them in a form they could see.

The appearances of God in the Old Testament are called Theophanies. The term

means “appearances of God.” The article you refer to takes the position that the divine Person who appears repeatedly as the “Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament is none other than the preincarnate Christ, who is in very nature God.

Q *You have said that the One who became Christ was the God of the Old Testament, but Hebrews 1:1 says that God (not Jesus) at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to the prophets of the Old Testament-but now in these last times He has spoken to us by His Son, Jesus. Doesn't this suggest that the Father spoke to the prophets and that Jesus did not speak to the prophets or us at any prior time?*

A We have stated many times that the Person of the Godhead who became a flesh-and-blood human being was “the God of the Old Testament.” However, this statement needs some clarification. First, the word God can be used in reference to the Godhead (the Father and the Son together). It can also be used in reference to either Person of the Godhead. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Family consisting of Father and Son is God. When we say that the Person who later became Jesus Christ was “the God of the Old Testament,” we mean that the Member of the God Family (or Godhead) who appeared to and spoke with the ancients was the One who later came in the flesh. Actually, it is correct to say that God the Father was the God of the Old Testament. The Logos, or “Word” (John 1:1), served as His Agent, or Spokesman, who acted on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign. That both were involved in creation is seen in Genesis 1:26 and in John 1:1-3. Genesis 1:26 states, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” John 1:1-3 states: “In the beginning was the Word [the Logos], and the Word was with God [the Father], and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” Thus, both divine Persons participated in creation. Both are “God,” though they differ functionally. Notice that Hebrews 1:1 says that God spoke to the prophets “in divers manners.” One of the “diverse manners” in which the Father spoke to the prophets was through the One who later came in the flesh. When God sent His Son, the Son spoke to His disciples directly, without the use of prophets.

Q *In Revelation 3:14, Jesus says He is “the beginning of the creation of God.” Was Jesus created first, before anything else?*

A In Revelation 3:14, the term “beginning” is better rendered “origin” (as in the New Revised Standard Version), or “source” (“prime source” in the New English Bible). Christ was the Origin of the creation of God, not in the sense of “original creation,” but in the sense of “Originator,” or “originating Instrument.” He was the “Beginning” in that He was the Beginner. This concurs fully with John 1:3: “All things were made by [or through] Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” He obviously was not made, for nothing was made without Him. This also agrees with Colossians 1:15,16: “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature [or “firstborn of all creation,” NRSV]: For [i.e., here’s why He is Firstborn of all creation] by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...” In this passage,

“Firstborn” is a title of preeminence. It tells us that Christ has preeminence over all creation because He is Creator-that is, He was the Agent through whom the Father created all things. He is obviously not one of the created “things.”

Q *Doesn't Proverbs 8:22-31 clearly indicate that the Logos was a created being-in fact, the Father's first creation?*

A John wrote, “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....And 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 1:1-3,14).

The “Word,” or Logos (Greek), was the Father’s agent in Creation. He was with the Father in the beginning, and was Himself divine. He came to this earth as a flesh-and-blood human being-Jesus Christ-and gave His life for the sins of the world.

Many early apologists and a few modern commentators believe the “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8 is none other than the preincarnate Christ-the divine Logos who acted as the Father’s agent in creation and in communicating with the ancients. However, most recognize the poetic nature of the passage and conclude that the author was using simple personification.

Personification is common in ancient and modern literature, and was used frequently by the prophets and poets of Israel. In the Hebrew texts, sin lies in wait for unsuspecting victims (Genesis 4:7), Abel’s blood cries out to God (verse 10), cyprus trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice over the fall of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:8), the grave excitedly expects to meet the king (verse 9), mountains and hills rejoice, and the trees of the field clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). It’s not surprising to find “wisdom” offering admonition to the foolish, and there’s no reason to think that the poetic description of this virtue is anything other than simple personification.

Even if Proverbs 8 does in some way allude to the preincarnate Christ, it does not prove that He was created at some point in time. Wisdom was “brought forth” before the earth was created (verses 23b-25), but “brought forth” does not necessarily denote origin with reference to time. In the same breath, Wisdom informs us, “I have been established from everlasting” (verse 23a), indicating that there was never a time when she did not exist.

Generally, the poetic description of Proverbs 8-9 should not be interpreted Christologically, but should be understood simply as the personification of an outstanding virtue.

Q *In Isaiah 48:16, the speaker, who is clearly God, distinguishes Himself from two other personalities. He refers to one as the “Lord God,” and to the other as “His Spirit.” Doesn't this prove that God is a Trinity?*

A Isaiah 48:16 states: “Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.” In the preceding verses, and perhaps in the first part of verse 16, God is the Speaker. However, in the latter part of verse 16, the prophet is the speaker. He speaks of his own divinely appointed mission. Of course, the prophet’s words, in their fullest sense, apply to the Messiah and His mission.

The “Lord God” and the Messiah are two distinct Persons, but why should we think that “His Spirit” is a third Person? Remember, Scripture tells us that man has a spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Is a man’s spirit a person distinct from the man? Of course not! Why, then, should we think that “His Spirit” is a personality distinct from the “Lord God”?

The Spirit of God is consistently presented as the power, spiritual extension, influence, indwelling, and presence of God-not as a third Person within a triune Godhead. This definition applies perfectly to Isaiah’s reference to “His Spirit.”

Isaiah 48:16 provides no support for trinitarian dogma.

Q *Why is Christ called “the everlasting Father” in Isaiah 9:6?*

A The Hebrew term translated “father” is *ab*, which means father, ancestor, source, or inventor. The reference to Christ as “everlasting Father” is rich in meaning. He is a Father in the sense that He is Creator-that is, He was the active Agent through whom God created all things (John 1:1,2; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). He is also a Father in the sense that He is the Source of salvation, the Head of the new creation (Ephesians 1:21,22; Colossians 1:18). As the first Adam was the father of “those who are made of dust,” the second Adam (Christ) is the Father of “those who are heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:47,48). This does not mean that Christ and God the Father are one and the same; it simply means that Christ is a Father in the sense that He is the Beginning, the Origin, of God’s spiritual creation. The patriarchs of Israel-Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the sons of Jacob, and the heads of the tribes that descended from them-are repeatedly referred to as “the fathers” in Scripture. (The term patriarch means “father.”) Christ, as the singular Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), is the everlasting Patriarch of Abraham’s spiritual seed. Paul wrote, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed [regardless of physical lineage], and heirs according to the promise [the promise given to Abraham]” (Galatians 3:29). The title of Father belongs to God the Father in a unique way, but Scripture reveals that the term has different senses of meaning and appropriately applies to many. Since the first Adam is the father of humankind; since Abraham is the “father of the faithful”; since he, along with Isaac, Jacob, Jacob’s sons, and the heads of the tribes of Israel are called “fathers”; and since the apostle Paul refers to himself as a “father” to the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:15), it is not surprising that Christ-the divine Agent in creation; the second Adam; the Origin, Beginning, Source, and Head of God’s spiritual creation-is called “everlasting Father” in Isaiah 9:6.

Q You have stated that Jesus Christ bled to death after being pierced by a Roman soldier's spear (or sword). However, John 19:33,34 says that the soldier pierced Jesus after seeing that He was already dead. Why do you say that Jesus was pierced before He died?

A First, let's notice the wording of Matthew 27:48-50 as it appears in the King James Version (KJV):
"And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

This passage says nothing about Jesus being pierced. However, many ancient manuscripts include a statement at the end of verse 49 that does not appear in the KJV. This statement is included in some of our English versions, including the Fenton and Moffatt translations. Notice how the Fenton translation renders verses 49 and 50:

"But the others called out, 'Let Him alone! Let us see whether Elijah will come and save Him!' But another taking a spear pierced His side, when blood and water came out. Jesus, however, having again called out with a loud voice, resigned His spirit."

The Moffatt translation renders the passage similarly: "But the other said, 'Stop, let us see if Elijah does come to save him!' (Seizing a lance, another pricked [the Greek root is *nussoo*, which means "pierced"] his side, and out came water and blood.)"

Neither Mark's account nor Luke's tell of Jesus being pierced, but remember that no one account describes all the details. In order to get a full picture of what happened, and the order in which each event occurred, it is necessary to put all the accounts together, and to consider any possible variation in translation. With this in mind, let's turn our attention to John's account.

John 19:33,34 states: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."

This account, as it appears in English, seems to say that the soldier pierced Jesus after it was discovered that He was already dead. The usual explanation is that they wanted to make sure He was dead. However, in the Greek, the word translated "pierced" in our English Bibles is in the aorist tense; therefore, the term ("pierced") refers not to the time of the action, but to the kind of action. Since "pierced" is in the aorist tense in the Greek, the passage could mean that Christ was pierced after the soldiers discovered that He was dead, or it could mean that He had already been pierced when the soldiers observed that He was dead. It can be understood either way, but in view of Matthew's account, with the insertion of the missing portion of verse 49 (chapter 27), we have reason to believe that John was saying that the soldiers didn't break Jesus's' legs because He was already dead, having been pierced.

Other scriptures support the above. For instance, the manner in which the Passover and other sacrifices (all of which foreshadowed Christ) were killed (they were "pierced," or cut with a blade, and bled to death) more closely fits the description of Christ bleeding to death as the result of being pierced. While this alone does not prove that Christ died after being pierced, when all things are considered-that is, the missing verse, John's use

of the aorist tense, and Christ's death compared with the Passover sacrifice-it is evident that Christ died after being pierced.

It is also significant that Pilate marveled that Christ's death occurred so quickly (Mark 15:42-45). When report came that He was already dead, Pilate checked with a centurion to make certain that He was in fact dead. Pilate knew that death through crucifixion involved prolonged suffering, often lasting two or three days. The two "thieves" who were crucified alongside Christ died after having their legs broken, but Christ was dead already. Why did His death occur so soon? The most plausible explanation is that He bled to death-the result of having been pierced.

THE LAW OF GOD

Q *James speaks of the "law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12). Paul speaks of the "yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). What two laws are they talking about?*

A James writes, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty." James cites two of the Ten Commandments, and then speaks of being judged by the "law of liberty" (James 2:10-12). This "perfect law of liberty" is something a person "looks into" and "continues in" (1:25). Obviously, it includes the Ten Commandments. James calls it the "law of liberty" because he understands that true freedom is possible only in the framework of law.

The "yoke of bondage" Paul mentions in Galatians 5:1 is not the law, but is a spiritual condition that resulted from the wrong use of the law. Paul explains, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (verse 4). To be "justified" is to have one's sins blotted out and be given a right standing before God-a state of being that cannot be attained through any law. "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law" (Galatians 3:21). Therefore, the Galatians who were seeking justification through law (which cannot provide it), and not through Christ (who can provide it), had "fallen from grace."

Q *Is the law "added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:17-25) the law pertaining to sacrifices, washings, and so forth, or is it the "moral law," or Ten Commandments?*

A The law Paul speaks of in the book of Galatians is the entire law as codified in the Sinaitic covenant. It includes the Ten Commandments as well as the sacrificial and ceremonial laws. It was "added because of transgressions" in that it was codified and given to Israel in order to make the people aware of their sins. As Paul said to the Romans, "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have

known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7).

One of the law's functions is to make us aware of our transgressions. When Paul said that the law was added "till the Seed should come" (Galatians 3:19), he did not mean that the law had no more purpose or function once Christ (the Seed) had come. Rather, he meant that the law had accomplished its purpose in making us aware of our transgressions and, therefore, our need for a Savior. The "Seed" did not abolish the law, but the record of transgressions for those who put their trust in Him.

Because of the law's function in making him aware of his sins and of his need for a Savior, the apostle Paul could say, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

The law also has the function of revealing the way of life God would have us follow (see Psalm 119:97-104). Because of this function of the law, Paul could say, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7:22).

Q *Would you comment on Paul's reference to the "freewoman" and "bondwoman" (Galatians 4:24,25)? Verses 30 and 31 teach that Christians are not children of the bondwoman, which is identified as the covenant from Mount Sinai. Doesn't this suggest that the law given at Mount Sinai has been done away?*

A Galatians 4:24,25 reads: "which things are symbolic. For these [the "bondwoman" and the "freewoman"] are the two covenants: the one from the Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children."

Notice that Paul was comparing the "bondwoman" and "freewoman" with "the two covenants"-i.e., the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Remember, a covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. The law, in and of itself, was not the covenant; therefore, we should not assume that the law was abolished when the covenant was terminated.

God, through the prophet Jeremiah, tells us why the Old Covenant was dissolved, and makes it clear that the termination of the former covenant does not entail abolition of the law. Notice: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant [i.e., a new covenant, which will replace the old one-the one they broke] that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The reason the Old Covenant "gives birth to bondage" is that the people broke God's law, thus placing themselves under bondage. The New Covenant is different in that it involves having the law written on the heart, which is another way of speaking of a heart of obedience (compare Deuteronomy 5:29). Sin is the source of bondage. Under the New

Covenant, the source of bondage is completely remitted, thus producing freedom-not “freedom” to break the law, but freedom from the bondage of sin.

Q *Doesn't Hebrews 7:12 tell us that the old Law of Moses has been abolished and replaced with a new law?*

A Hebrews 7:12 states: “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.” The change of the law was not the abolition of the Law of Moses. Rather, it was a change in the law concerning the priesthood. This is made clear in verses 13 through 19.

In the Levitical priesthood, all priests were to be descendants of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. However, since Jesus Christ “arose from [the tribe of] Judah” (Hebrews 7:14), He could be a priest only if the law restricting priesthood to the family of Aaron (of the tribe of Levi) were changed. Had the law in its entirety been abolished, it is unlikely that the writer of Hebrews would have bothered explaining that a change had occurred in one of the law’s commandments.

Q *Does Matthew 9:14-17 mean that it is a mistake to try to mix the Old Covenant law with the New Covenant gospel?*

A The extreme discontinuity between the law and the gospel is popular among dispensationalists, but was never a part of the teachings of Jesus. Matthew 9:14-17 simply means that it would not have been appropriate for the disciples to mourn (symbolized by fasting) while Christ was with them, for He was the central figure-the prophesied Davidic King-of all promises of hope for Israel and the world. Christ uses three parables to illustrate the inappropriateness of mourning (fasting) while He is present: 1) the bridegroom’s attendants (verse 15); 2) the new patch and the old garment (verse 16); and 3) the new wine and the old wineskin (verse 17). Christ is saying that mourning (fasting) while the Source of hope is present is as inappropriate as putting new, fermenting wine into old, hardened wineskins; or as putting a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or as the bridegroom’s attendants mourning while the bridegroom is present. John the Baptist’s purpose was to call the people to repentance, which involved mourning and fasting, in preparation for Christ’s coming. But once Christ had arrived, it was time for His followers-those who had longed for His presence-to rejoice.

Q *Does Matthew 5:38-42 mean that if someone attacks me or takes my belongings, I have to stand there and take it? Is it wrong to defend oneself from an attacker?*

A Matthew 5:38-42 is Jesus’s response to the notion that the “eye for an eye” law permitted personal vengeance. It did not. Rather, it was directed to the judges (Exodus 21:22-25), and was simply another way of saying that the compensation for a wrong done to a person must match the damages. Jesus’s directive to “turn

the other cheek” can be understood two ways: First, it can be understood as a hyperbolic way of expressing how far a person should distance himself from seeking personal vengeance (and remember, personal vengeance is very different from self defense), just as “tear it out” and “cut it off” (verses 29-30) are hyperbolic ways of expressing how far a person should distance himself from sinful behavior. Second, Jesus may be speaking of situations in which resistance would only result in further damages (compare with verses 25-26). In any case, Jesus is not forbidding self-defense.

Q *Does Matthew 5:19 say that a commandment-breaker will be in the Kingdom, though he will be least in the Kingdom? Does this not conflict with scriptures that say that commandment-breakers will not be in the Kingdom at all?*

A Luke 12:42-48 teaches that, when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom, there will be degrees of privilege or dishonor based on how faithfully a person upheld God’s standards. The saints—those who inherit the Kingdom at Christ’s return—will be the most honored in the Kingdom. Some of the mortal subjects of the Kingdom, however, will have to answer for having neglected to uphold God’s righteous standards. Matthew 5:19 does not mean that commandment breakers will enter the immortal, Spirit-born family of God at Christ’s return; it simply means that when the Kingdom is established, those who have annulled even the least of God’s standards will receive no honor.

Q *Why do you quote from the Old Testament in establishing doctrine for Christians? Shouldn’t Christians get their beliefs from the New Testament alone, especially from the epistles of Paul?*

A Listen carefully to what the apostle Paul says about the so-called “Old Testament”: To Timothy, Paul writes, “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15,16).

The only Scriptures Timothy could have known from childhood was the collection of books we call the “Old Testament.” Therefore, Paul is speaking of the Old Testament when he says that the Scriptures can make a person wise for salvation; is inspired of God; is useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, thus equipping the man of God for every good work.

According to the New Testament, then, doctrinal truth applicable to Christians can be derived from the Old Testament!

Q *The book of Leviticus contains what I would call hard laws: those laws that have to do with types of uncleanness and defilement and require washings and separation from other people until evening. How do these laws apply today?*

A The “hard laws” of Leviticus, found in chapters 11 through 15, are the ones people often refer to when they charge us with “picking” the Old Testament laws we want to keep and rejecting all others. Of course, we should not “reject” any of the commandments of the Torah, but simply recognize that some laws have cultural limitations and some do not. For instance, laws concerning livestock and agriculture would not directly apply to city-dwellers. Laws regarding flat-roofed houses do not directly apply to most of us because most of us do not live in a flat-roofed house (though there may be an underlying principle that applies to our situation). How or whether a particular law directly applies to us depends upon the purpose of that law.

The sacrifices, washings, and periods of separation for various kinds of defilement were given to instill discipline and give sanction to public health laws. These regulations helped keep the people from slipping into unsanitary practices that would contribute to poor health and the spread of various diseases. Our modern health regulations capture the intent and fulfill the purpose of these Old Testament ceremonial regulations.

Q *Jesus said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Didn't He mean that He was setting aside the law, not by abolishing it, but by completing its purpose?*

A The word translated “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17 literally means “to fill” or “make full.” Jesus “fulfilled” the law, or “made it full,” by stripping it of the erroneous interpretations that had been added to it by men, and by restoring its original meaning and intent. The remainder of the chapter provides several examples of how Jesus restored the true purpose and meaning of various laws while exposing the false ideas that had been added by men.

For instance, some of the Jews of Jesus’s day saw the divorce law of Deuteronomy 24:1 as a license for divorce. But a careful examination of the passage reveals that the purpose of this law was to discourage divorce. Knowing this, Jesus brought to light the good and perfect will of God regarding the divinely ordained institution of marriage (see Matthew. 5:31,32).

Another example is the way some interpreted the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” law. This law was part of Israel’s justice system, and was to be administered by the judges (Exodus 21:22-25). Unfortunately, by the time of Jesus some were citing the law as an excuse for personal vengeance. Jesus clearly recognized this error (see Matthew 5:38-42).

Many of the erroneous interpretations Jesus was dealing with came from the Pharisees and other religious parties. No doubt, as He exposed and refuted their false teachings, the angered religious leaders accused Him of trying to destroy or abolish the law. That’s why Jesus said. “Do not think that I came to destroy the law....”

To underscore the fact that He did not come to abolish the law, Jesus added, “For 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. 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 5:18,19).

A clue as to whose erroneous interpretations He had in mind throughout His discourse lies in the next verse; “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” (verse 20).

4. THE SABBATH AND HOLY DAYS

Q *The Sabbath is not mentioned in any of the lists of evils or lists of virtues in the New Testament. Doesn't this suggest that the Fourth Commandment is no longer in force?*

A It is a mistake to view the New Testament as a “systematic theology” or “statement of beliefs” or “creed” compiled by the apostles for the purpose of providing church members with an exposition on all the laws, commandments, and doctrines of the New Covenant. The church already had access to the Old Testament, and believed it to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

One reason the Sabbath is rarely mentioned in the epistles is that there was no conflict over which day to keep, or whether to keep it. At first, the church was entirely Jewish. Aside from the Samaritans, who were also Sabbathkeepers, the earliest non-Jewish Christians were people biblical historians describe as “God-fearers.” They were gentiles who, though uncircumcised, worshiped the God of the Hebrews. Many of them first heard the gospel while in the synagogue on the Sabbath day (see Acts 13:14-16, 26,38-45; 14:1; 16:13,14; 17:2-4; 18:4). Thus, the church, from its foundation, was a Sabbath-keeping church.

The silence of the New Testament epistles on the subject of the Sabbath, if anything, supports the Sabbathkeepers’ position. Had the church-with its Jewish leaders, thousands of Jewish converts, and growing number of God-fearing gentiles-not been keeping the Sabbath, it is extremely doubtful that we would find such silence in the New Testament. Surely the Pharisaic believers who caused such a stir over circumcision (Acts 15) would have vigorously and loudly voiced their objection had the early Christians abandoned the Sabbath. Yet, no such objection is recorded in the New Testament.

Large sections of the Old Testament make no mention of the Sabbath, though we know that the Sabbath was in full force and was being observed during the times those sections were written. Therefore, New Testament silence on this subject by no means indicates that the apostles and early Christians regarded the Fourth Commandment as obsolete.

Q *I would like to ask your help in explaining something I am having trouble understanding. I know that you depend heavily on Leviticus 23 to prove that people should observe the holy days that are listed there. Several verses say that “it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.” But it also says that God told Moses to “speak unto the children of Israel” about these things. It seems like these days*

and festivals were intended only for the Hebrew people in ancient times. There is no indication that other people were ever meant to observe them. The fact that it says “a statute for ever among your generations” does not seem to be enough to prove that everyone, everywhere, even today should observe these days. If the instructions were given to the “children of Israel,” how could others who never received the instructions be expected to follow them.

Also, Leviticus 24 speaks of using olive oil to keep the lamps burning continually. Verse 3 says this “shall be a statute for ever in your generations.” I’m sure you do not believe this applies today. Your churches do not have lamps burning continually. So how can you say chapter 23 is still to be observed but chapter 24 is not when they both say “forever in your generations.”

Finally, back in chapter 23, there are several references to an offering made of fire. Your churches do not offer burnt offerings. How can you pick some parts of the chapter to obey but not other parts. For example, verses 7 and 8 say, “ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.” You believe the first part about servile work should be obeyed but not the part about a burnt offering-and yet they are part of the same statement.

You see my problem? You appear to pick certain chapters and verses and say everyone needs to obey them. But then other verses that use the same language, “a statute for ever,” you say do not need to be obeyed.

Please help me to understand the reason for this.

A First, you are quite right in saying, “The fact that it says ‘a statute for ever among your generations’ does not seem to be enough to prove that everyone, everywhere, even today should observe these days.” Obviously, God does not hold people responsible for holy days they know nothing about. These days were given to Israel, as you point out, and there is no evidence that God had revealed them to anyone else before establishing them for the nation He brought out of Egypt.

However, the continuity between Israel and the church cannot be ignored. In Romans 11:16-24, the true Israel is depicted as an olive tree with both natural and grafted branches, which represent converted Jews and gentiles. Thus, Israel’s tree is the church. In Romans 2:28,29, Paul says, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly....” In Galatians 4:29, the apostle states, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” For this reason, Paul can speak of the church as “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

God’s promise of renewing His covenant with Israel is applied to the church (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13), and prophecy pertaining to the restoration of Israel finds fulfillment in the establishment of the church (cf. Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21). Gentile converts to Christianity were once “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise,” but in Christ those “who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12,13). These believing gentiles are “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints [believing Israelites] and members of the household of God” (verse 19).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God reveals that the time will come when many non-Israelites will seek to learn the ways of the God of Israel. “For out of Zion shall go forth the

law [to the nations], and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). So, yes, the law God gave to Israel was not meant to be exclusively for Israel. This can be seen in several Old Testament passages, including Zechariah 14, where God calls for the nations outside Israel to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. It also comes across very clearly in the New Testament. For instance, Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, applies the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue (a part of the law given to Israel) to gentile believers, and even gives the land-promise associated with that commandment a universal application (Ephesians 6:1-3). Of course, Paul knew, as we do today, that certain aspects of the law were limited to specific times and places, and only certain underlying principles can be applied outside those time/place boundaries.

For ancient Israel, the law was viewed through the “lenses” of the Exodus. Laws pertaining to slavery, laws dealing with foreigners, and laws concerning the observance of Sabbaths and festivals were Exodus-related. In fact, the Sinaitic Covenant is Exodus-centered. Obviously, festivals commemorating the Exodus and related events have less meaning for non-Israelites than for Israelites. But once it is recognized that the festivals are not static in meaning, and that they actually have more New Covenant and Christological meaning than Exodus/Old Covenant meaning, then citizens of the “Israel of God” can see clearly that the annual festivals of Leviticus 23 do, in fact, apply to the New Covenant community.

How a particular law applies to a Christian must be determined on the basis of (1) the purpose of the law in question, and (2) the Christological/New Covenant meaning of that law. Only then will we be fully equipped to determine how a particular law relates to our situation. Where holy days are concerned, we realize that it would be quite unlawful to offer the sacrifices associated with them in our churches. The law demands that sacrifices be offered only at the tabernacle (or temple), and only under the supervision of the Levitical priesthood. However, it was always understood by the Israelites that a person could lawfully observe the holy days outside of Jerusalem, or, for that matter, outside of Israel.

The lighting of the candles you refer to pertains to the tabernacle, not local churches. While there is an abundance of evidence that in the future the temple will be rebuilt, the priesthood restored, and the sacrifices reinstated under the direction of the Jesus Christ (see Ezekiel 40-48), the temple (tabernacle) is not standing now and there is no functional priesthood officiating. Our churches are not patterned after the temple services, but are more like the synagogues that served as learning and worship centers for the scattered Jews and God-fearing gentiles of the ancient world. It would be a mistake to apply the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the tabernacle/temple to local churches.

When we observe the annual holy days, we are celebrating the sacrificial and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. We recognize that the holy days are a “shadow” of the good things Christ makes possible for His people, but His is the “body” that casts the shadow (see Colossians 2:16,17).

Q *I have read of the church keeping the feast days as well as the Sabbath days, and have accepted these teachings. However, after reading Galatians 4:9,10, I am having trouble with why we are to keep these days. Is Paul saying we are not to be bound by the festivals and Sabbaths set forth under the law if we are in Christ?*

A Paul writes, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now 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 4:8-11).

Since the problem was that some of the Galatian believers were being persuaded to adopt some form of Judaism as a means of salvation or spiritual perfection, many have thought that the “days and months and seasons and years” were the Sabbaths, new moons, festivals, and sabbatical years described in the Law of Moses. But let’s remember that Judaism is not precisely the same as the Law of Moses, or religion of the Old Testament. Some forms of Judaism revised the Law considerably, and picked up certain pagan elements along the way.

Daniel G. Reid states, “From Second Temple Judaism there comes ample evidence of speculation about the universe and how the heavenly bodies were related to angels. The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries in 1 Enoch 72-82, a work dating from perhaps the first century B.C., testifies to Jewish astrological ideas and the association of an angel, Uriel, with the stars. This is set within a context in which particular attention is paid to times and seasons” (Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, 1993, p. 231, emphasis added).

These astrological beliefs were probably held by some Jewish sects during the time of the apostles. In all likelihood, the astrological “times and seasons” are the “days and months and seasons and years” Paul has in mind in Galatians 4:10. The apostle warns these former pagans that those who were taking up astrological observances common to certain Jewish and pagan religious sects were returning to the base and worthless elements they had served before they became believers in Jesus Christ.

Paul fully recognized the Christological significance of the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days. By no means was he condemning the observance of these divinely ordained institutions.

Q *I have read your material on the Sabbath, but I am still left without an answer when asked about the time difference between the Holy Land and Kentucky. When it is sundown Friday in Jerusalem, what time would it be here in Kentucky? If one is keeping the Sabbath correctly, it seems he would have to observe the exact same time period as God did in the Genesis account of creation. It seems those exact hours would be the only ones He made holy by resting in them. What do you think?*

A God set aside and declared holy the seventh day of each week. Sabbathkeepers throughout the world observe the same day, but do not observe the day at the exact same time, or during the same hours. The Sabbath starts and ends in Jerusalem before it starts and ends in the United States. The Bible nowhere says that we should determine the beginning and end of the seventh day (or any other day) according to “Jerusalem time.”

In ancient times, when an Israelite traveled in foreign lands, he observed the Sabbath when it came to him. No Israelite, regardless of his location in the world, ever

perceived that the Sabbath started at any time other than sunset-and the Bible gives no instruction concerning Sabbath “adjustments” for traveling Israelites.

We need not worry about what time it is in Jerusalem. We should simply observe the seventh day when it comes to us.

Q *Years ago, the church taught that the Day of Pentecost was always on a Monday. Today, the church observes Pentecost on a Sunday. When, and why, was Pentecost changed from Monday to Sunday?*

A The church changed its practice of a Monday Pentecost in 1974. Before that time, many could see that the “Monday” explanation was theologically weak, but it was not until 1974 that the church began observing Pentecost on a Sunday.

In brief, here’s the reason we believe Pentecost should fall on a Sunday:

The sheaf of the firstfruits was to be waved before the Lord “on the day after the Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:11). Pentecost was to be counted this way: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [the day after the Sabbath is the first day of the week-Sunday], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed” (verse 15). This verse tells us which day to count from; the next verse tells us which day to count to: “Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath...” (verse 16).

Notice three very important points: (1) We are to count from the first day of the week (Sunday). (2) We are to count to the first day of the week. (3) We are to count fifty days (Pentecost means “fiftieth,” indicating that it falls on the fiftieth day of the count). The instructions are simple and easy to understand. Not only are we told which day to count from, we are told which day to count to. And to make what is clear even clearer, we are told how many days we are to count. If we begin counting on a Sunday (the “day after the Sabbath”), the fiftieth day of our count will be a Sunday (the “day after the seventh Sabbath”).

The old view was full of errors. The claim that the Hebrew word translated “from” (as in “from the day after the Sabbath”) is not inclusive was wrong. The normal meaning of the Hebrew construction for “count from the day after the Sabbath” is “begin counting on the day after the Sabbath.” To our knowledge, there is not a single Hebrew scholar anywhere who agrees with the old argument.

In addition, the Jubilee cycle should be considered. The fiftieth year, or year of release, was the Jubilee. It followed the seventh sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:1-17). It makes sense that the Feast of Weeks would follow the same pattern: Seven full weeks, each ending with the Sabbath, with the Day of Pentecost falling on the day after the seventh Sabbath.

Q *Doesn’t Paul remind the Colossians that the Mosaic law was nailed to the cross and, in the same context, warn of heretics who would have them adopt Old Testament holy days (Colossians 2:14-17)?*

A The passage in question reads, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. And having spoiled [disarmed] principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (King James Version).

It is commonly assumed that the “handwriting of ordinances” is the Old Testament law. The term handwriting is from the Greek cheirographon, which generally refers to a legal document or bond, and is used of a “record book of sins” in Jewish apocalyptic literature.

The King James Version’s “handwriting of ordinances” is an unfortunate translation. Modern English versions are better, and generally do not leave the impression that Paul is speaking of Old Testament laws. Notice how Colossians 2:13b,14 is rendered in the following modern English versions:

The New Revised Standard Version: “when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.”

The New American Standard Bible: “having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

The New American Bible: “having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.”

The “record,” “certificate of debt,” or “bond” that was against us was not the Old Testament law; it was the record of our sins. When God forgives our sins, he erases the record completely.

In verse 16, Paul mentions the Sabbaths and festivals, but he does not chastise the Colossians for keeping them. He simply admonishes them to allow no one to judge them in matters regarding eating and drinking or Sabbath or festival observance. This suggests that the Colossians were observing holy days, and someone was judging them for it.

While many cite Colossians 2:16 as “proof” that the holy days were “done away,” at least a few evangelical scholars point out that the passage suggests that the Colossians were observing the holy days.

One such scholar is Douglas R. De Lacey, Ph.D., of the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, England). De Lacey says, “The ‘judgment’ seems to be criticism of the Christians’ present practice, apparently of eating and drinking and enjoying Jewish festivals, in contrast to those whose watchword was ‘do not handle, do not taste, do not even touch’ (Col. 2:21)” (*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, InterVarsity Press, 1993).

The troublemakers were philosophers who claimed that one could obtain a higher level of spirituality or righteousness by practicing asceticism (“Touch not; taste not; handle not”-verse 21). Paul says the philosophers’ regulations are nothing more than the “commandments and doctrines of men” (verse 22).

Given the nature of the problem, it is doubtful that the philosophers were judging the Colossians for keeping or not keeping Sabbaths and festivals. More likely, their

judgment was based on how the Colossians kept the holy days. It seems that the joy, laughter, and pleasure of eating and drinking—all of which were abundant on holy days—were not in agreement with the philosophers' ascetic views.

By attaching man-made regulations to Christian fellowship and holy day observance, the philosophers were missing the purpose of the holy days. Holy days are not an end in themselves; they are a means to an end. As Paul says, they are a “shadow of things to come,” but Christ is the “body” that casts the shadow. Without the body (or “substance”), the shadow is worth little. With the body, however, the shadow serves as a means of enhancing worship and increasing understanding and appreciation of Christ's redemptive work and God's plan for mankind.

5. SALVATION

Q *Ephesians 2:8-10 says that salvation is by grace and through faith. What are grace and faith, and how do they relate to “good works”?*

A Ephesians 2:8-10 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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God's grace is His divine favor, His merciful kindness toward us. Faith may be defined simply as trusting belief in God and His promises. Salvation, then, is available to us only because of God's merciful kindness. We obtain it by trusting in God and the provisions He has made for us. This trusting belief, or faith, always manifests itself through the actions of the person possessing it (see Hebrews 11). That's what Paul means when he says that God's people are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Q *Are people who have never heard of Jesus going to the lake of fire? What about small children? It doesn't seem God would punish people who never knew to repent. Please help.*

A Concerning the name of Jesus Christ, the New Testament informs us that “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus says, “He who believes in Him [Christ] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Paul asks, “And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). This indicates that a person must first hear the gospel, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, before he can be saved.

Yet, we are also told that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), and that Jesus Christ “gave Himself a ransom for

all, to be testified in due time” (verse 6). He is the “Savior of all men” (4:10), the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42). He was not sent “to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (3:17). God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

If God desires that all be saved, but salvation is possible only through the name of Jesus Christ, doesn't it make sense to conclude that God will, in His own time, see to it that all have an opportunity to hear the gospel, turn to Him in repentance, and accept Jesus Christ as Savior?

God's Word reveals that many will receive salvation during the Millennium (Jeremiah 23:5-8; 31:31-34; 33:14-16; cf. Revelation 20:4-6; 5:9,10). First, the scattered peoples of Israel and Judah will be brought to their own land, where they will learn of Christ the King, and become a model nation for all the other nations of the world. From that beginning, the truth of God will go out into all the earth. The nations will seek to learn of Him, and inquire of His ways (Isaiah 2:2-4). The knowledge of God will fill the earth.

But what about those who lived and died but never had an opportunity for salvation? Listen to John's description of the post-millennial resurrection, or Great White Throne Judgment:

“Then [after the Millennium] I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11,12).

Now, considering the scriptural teaching that God desires all to be saved, what will happen in this post-millennial judgment period if those who had never heard the name of Jesus Christ learn the truth regarding salvation? (Surely the process of judgment requires that those being judged hear and understand the truth.) A clue is provided in the text above. Read it again, and notice that the Book of Life is open during this period. Those who had not previously known the way of salvation—all who had never had a full opportunity to come to repentance and accept Jesus Christ as Savior—will have a chance to repent. And when they do repent, surely God will write their names in the Book of Life.

Scripture indicates that only the terribly wicked—those who willfully reject God's offer of salvation—will be cast into the lake of fire.

At present, the dead are unconscious, completely oblivious to the passage of time. At the Second Coming, the dead in Christ will awaken to eternal life and rise to meet the returning Lord. After the Millennium, the rest of the dead will awaken to a mortal existence and be judged. But judgment is not synonymous with condemnation. Peter writes, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). This shows that the process of judgment can and does produce the positive results of repentance and conviction. There is no reason to think, then, that God will not give those who had never had a full opportunity for salvation a chance to receive it during the Great White Throne Judgment period.

Q *Isn't it true that God can give His Holy Spirit to a person who has not been baptized?*

A It is true that God can give His Holy Spirit to a person though that person has not been baptized. However, that fact is aside from the real question. The real question is: Should a repentant believer be baptized? The clear scriptural answer is a most decided yes. Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20). Later, on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter 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” (Acts 2:38).

Scriptural example shows that even in a rare instance in which someone receives the Holy Spirit without first being baptized, baptism should still be administered (Acts 10:44-48).

Q *The apostle Paul said that salvation comes by grace through faith, “and that not of yourselves,” while James said that “a man is justified by works, and not faith alone.” Did James and Paul disagree on this subject? Is a person saved by grace through faith alone? Or is salvation the product of faith combined with works?*

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

Yet, the apostle Paul said, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Romans 4:2,3).

Notice that Paul and James quoted the very same scripture to support their arguments, which, at first glance, seem to be contradictory.

James wrote only the one epistle, but Paul wrote several, and was consistent in his teaching that justification comes by way of faith alone. He insisted that “God reckons righteousness apart from works” (verse 6), and stated unequivocally, “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). He sharply rebuked certain false teachers among the Galatians for teaching that justification comes through a means other than faith.

The solution to the seeming conflict between Paul and James lies in understanding the meaning of justification, and the way both writers used this term.

When Paul spoke of being justified by faith alone, he used the term to denote one’s legal standing before God. In other words, to be “justified” is to be forgiven of sins and declared righteous before God. No quantity of good works can produce this state of justification. It is granted to sinners, not on the condition that they first produce an impressive record of righteous deeds, but on the basis of faith alone! That’s what Paul meant when he said that Abraham’s belief (faith) was counted as righteousness.

However, the term justification is not restricted to one narrow definition or nuance of meaning. Not only can the term mean “to be made righteous,” it can also mean “to show to be righteous, or just.” James had this meaning in mind when he wrote of justification.

James wrote, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).

The answer is obvious: No, a faith that produces no works is not saving faith. James’s point was that if faith is genuine-if it’s the kind of faith through which a person is saved-then it will produce evidence of its existence. He didn’t mean that a person can be made right with God only after he has performed sufficient works. He meant that if a person has been made righteous before God-not on the basis of his own merits, but by grace through genuine faith-then his faith will be reflected in his behavior.

Paul spoke of the faith that God sees, while James spoke of the faith that man sees. God knows whether we have real faith-saving faith-for He looks upon the heart. But man cannot look upon the heart; therefore, the only way men can “see” faith is by the works it produces.

James continued, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:15-17).

James meant simply that if faith produces no works, then it’s not faith at all-that is, it’s not the kind of faith that pleases God. Merely saying that one has faith is not evidence of real faith, for real faith manifests itself in the way a person conducts his life.

Continue: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (verse 18).

Notice that James was speaking of what men are able to see. Men, unlike God, can see faith only by the works it produces.

James pointed out that there is a belief that produces no works, no positive response to God, and that such belief is of little value. He wrote, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (verses 19,20).

Belief in the existence of God is a good belief, but such belief is not necessarily evidence of true faith. It may be a form of faith, but if it produces no works, it is useless-it’s not the kind of faith that saves. James pointed out that even the demons “believe,” but their belief is not the kind of belief that results in good works or a change in behavior.

To make his point clear, James illustrated the nature of true faith by pointing to the action producing faith of Abraham.

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

For James, “faith only” meant fruitless faith, or faith that produces nothing, and “works” were inseparable from the trusting spirit (faith) that motivates them.

James was not saying that Abraham achieved righteousness by his works; he was saying that Abraham was shown to be righteous by his works. In other words, evidence of

real faith was seen in Abraham's obedience to God. Had Abraham refused to obey God's command to offer Isaac, then we may well conclude that Abraham's faith was not the faith that is reckoned as righteousness.

His "faith was working together with his works"-that is, his faith was producing works. The internal quality of faith was made evident by the things Abraham did.

James said that "by works faith was made perfect." The Greek word translated "made perfect" is teleioo, which means "to bring to an end by completing or perfecting," and is used "of accomplishing" and "of bringing to completeness" (W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 846). Christ said that His "power is made perfect [teleioo] in weakness," which means that His power is shown most perfectly when human weakness is present (see 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Abraham's faith was shown most perfectly, or made clearly evident, by the works it produced. His works were the end result, the accomplishment, of his faith.

James said that "the Scripture was fulfilled," and then quoted Genesis 15:6, the very same verse Paul quoted in showing that justification is granted through faith alone. By reading Genesis 15 and subsequent chapters, you will notice that Abraham's belief (faith) was "accounted to him for righteousness" years before he was called upon to offer Isaac! James obviously meant that the faith God had seen in Abraham's heart many years earlier was demonstrated in Abraham's obedience. Again, his obedience was the end-result, or accomplishment, of his faith.

James then cited another example of faith. He wrote, "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (verse 25).

Rahab believed that God was with the people of Israel, that Israel's God was the true God, and she acted according to her belief. Again, faith (belief) produced action (works). Thus, the record of Rahab's works-her act of receiving the messengers and of sending them out another way-shows us that Rahab had a real belief in God and in the promises He had made to Israel. Rahab was "justified" in that she was shown to be right, or to have a right attitude and perspective, by the things she did. Her outward actions demonstrated her inward faith.

James went on to explain, "For just as the body without the spirit [breath, or life principle] is dead, so also faith without works is dead." In other words, if faith does not produce works, it is not the kind of faith that pleases God-it is dead, useless.

By no means did James say that one can achieve a right standing before God by doing good works. He said that faith, if it is the kind of faith that pleases God, will produce works, thus making its presence evident to those of us who, unlike God, cannot look into a person's heart.

That's precisely what Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved [justified: forgiven, declared righteous] through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Good works cannot produce salvation, but they always accompany salvation.

Clearly, there is no disagreement between James's and Paul's teachings on faith, works, and justification. It's simply a matter of understanding what each meant when using

these terms.

Q *In 2 Peter 3:9, we are told that God is “not willing that any should perish....” Is this referring to God’s irresistible will or to His loving (but non-coercive) desire? Christian scholars seem unable to agree upon the meaning of this passage. Also, does this verse (and the surrounding text) imply that all opportunities for salvation will end at the return of Christ?*

A Theologians have argued over the meaning of 2 Peter 3:9 for hundreds of years. Some (often called hyper-Calvinists) hold that God’s “longsuffering toward us” refers to His toleration of the “vessels of wrath” as He reveals His glory through the “vessels of mercy” (cf. Romans 9:22,23). The vessels of wrath (according to this school of thought) are those not predestined to be saved. Though they displease God, He patiently tolerates them until the full number of the predestined have come to repentance. Other theologians (known as Armenians) hold that God’s seeming “slowness” is due to His giving man every opportunity to repent. He could intervene now, but He knows that He would have to destroy some who would have repented had they been given a little more time.

Both positions are problematic. To rid the passage of any suggestion that human will and choice are involved in salvation, hyper-Calvinists must define “us” (verse 9) as mankind in general, and restrict “all” to those predestined to salvation. “The Lord...is not willing” becomes a testimony to the sovereign will rather than a simple statement expressing God’s desire. Armenians must assume that more time will result in a greater percentage coming to repentance. Unfortunately, this idea conflicts with the recurring theme of moral degeneracy as a characteristic of the end time (as in 1 Timothy 4, for example).

The problem can be resolved by understanding that the “us” (rendered “you” in some translations) refers to Christians. Peter addresses his letter to “those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1), not to the unconverted, non-Christian world. Peter is telling his readers to avoid falling into the attitude of those who “willfully forget” (3:5) who say, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (verse 4). The Neronian persecutions were going on at that time, and were proving to be a fiery trial for many Christians. (Peter was probably referring to the Neronian persecutions in his first epistle, when he wrote, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...” [1 Peter 4:17].) Some Christians, perhaps fearful of death and weary of suffering and persecution, began saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” and claiming that their fathers’ long history of suffering continues unchanged. Obviously, Peter is speaking of Christians, as only they would speak of the promise of Christ’s coming and the dawning of a glorious new age.

In effect, Peter is saying: “The Lord is not slow concerning His promise to return, establish His Kingdom, and bring an end to the tribulation some of you are having to endure. Some of you are discouraged and think the Lord is unnecessarily slow in fulfilling His promise. But rather than thinking of Him as slow, you should think of Him as being patient with you, for He has called you and does not desire that you perish, but that you repent of anything that would separate you from Him. He knows that some of you have

succumbed to worldly influences and are not as careful as you once were in living holy lives. But know this: When the Day of the Lord comes, it will come suddenly, unexpectedly. The elements will melt with fervent heat; the old order will be completely overthrown. Knowing this should cause you to examine yourself and see to it that you are living a godly life.”

Peter was speaking to and about those who had already repented and accepted Christ after having been given an opportunity for salvation; therefore the passage does not confine all opportunities for salvation to this age.

Q *In Exodus 20:5, God says, “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, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Why must the children be punished for the sins of their parents? This seems awfully unjust.*

A At first glance, the passage does seem to suggest that innocent children are punished for the sins of their fathers. But notice that the passage you quoted does not say “innocent children.” Rather, it says that God punishes those who hate Him, but shows mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. God punishes the children for the sins of their parents only when the children follow their parents’ sinful ways.

There was a time during the tragic history of Israel that the people believed their trials and tribulations were due to the sins of their forefathers. But, through the prophet Ezekiel, God told the people they were in error.

God said, “Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul [the individual] who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him...” (Ezekiel 18:19-21).

If the children of the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:4) turn from the sinful ways they learned from their parents, and begin to love God and keep His commandments, God will be merciful to them. Anytime an evil person turns to God in wholehearted repentance, God will mercifully pardon him-no matter how sinful his parents may have been.

Q *Does Hebrews 6:4-6 teach that a Christian who falls away is lost forever?*

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

The terms used in this passage show that the writer was not speaking of the occasional slip due to momentary weakness or the temporary emergence of an old habit. To “crucify again” Jesus Christ and “put Him to an open shame” involves a deliberate and quite radical departure from the Christian faith.

Yes, the passage does teach that repentance is impossible for a certain class of people. But these two terms, repentance and impossible, provide the key to understanding how the unpardonable sin differs from other sins.

If an individual, after coming to true conversion and experiencing the joy of salvation, falls into temptation and commits sin, but then “comes to his senses” and repents of his wrongdoing, he has not committed the unpardonable sin-for he has demonstrated in his own life that for him repentance was not impossible.

If you think you have committed the unpardonable sin, are worried about it, and have prayed for God’s mercy, you need not fear that the door of salvation has been slammed shut for you. The very fact that you are concerned about it and have sought God’s mercy demonstrates a repentant attitude and therefore shows that you never “fell away” to the point that repentance was impossible.

6. THE SPIRIT WORLD

Q *I would appreciate your comments on Ezekiel 28. I believe God is talking about the ultimate end of the devil. What do you think?*

A Ezekiel 28 is a prophecy about the king of Tyre (verse 12). The prophecy is poetic, and uses symbol, metaphor, and hyperbole to describe the king, his perception of himself, his greatness, his wealth, his corruption, and his fate. (Isaiah 14 uses similar descriptions in its portrayal of the king of Babylon.)

However, it should be understood that God, when describing the king of Tyre, draws from the imagery of another “mighty one” whose self-exalting pride caused him to “fall.” The other mighty one was none other than the powerful supernatural being who became Satan the devil. The devil, as the ruler of this world, is the prototype of those human rulers who follow the same pattern of corruption.

While the descriptions found in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 reveal much about the origin of Satan, we should realize that they are first and foremost poetic descriptions of human leaders. We could therefore easily misapply or misinterpret passages from these chapters.

The descriptions of total destruction (Isaiah 14:15-20; Ezekiel 28:8-10) apply to the human potentates, but do not necessarily mean that the devil will cease to exist, or that he

will be transformed into a man and then destroyed. While God is certainly capable of causing that to happen, these passages do not demand the conclusion that it will happen.

Q Since “Michael” means “one who is like God,” who else but Jesus Christ can fit this description? Do you agree that you were in error [in a television program] in stating that Michael is an archangel, when there is no biblical basis for this Catholic/Protestant presumption? [Editor’s note: Unlike some who believe that Michael was Christ, this writer believes the preincarnate Christ was God, and that “Michael” was one of His names.]

A According to the book of Jude, Michael is an archangel (Jude 9). Jude tells us that even a strong angel like Michael refuses to pronounce judgment upon the devil, but the “Lord” (Christ, not Michael) will come “to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way...” (verses 14,15). Michael the archangel and Jesus the Messiah are clearly contrasted in this passage. Of course, this proves nothing if you reject the book of Jude.

You asked, “Since ‘Michael’ means ‘one who is like God,’ who else but Jesus Christ can fit this description?” Check Numbers 13:13; 1 Chronicles 5:13,14; 6:40; 7:3; 8:16; 12:20; 27:18; 2 Chronicles 21:2; and Ezra 8:8, and ask the same of the “Michael” named in each of these verses. There is one angel and several humans named Michael. The name means “Who is like God?”

In Daniel 10, Michael comes to the aid of the good angel (possibly Gabriel) to fight with the prince of the kingdom of Persia. Michael is “one of the chief princes,” or guardian angels. There are good and evil “princes” (angelic principalities) at work behind the scenes in the affairs of this world. Michael is Israel’s “prince,” or special guardian. As “one of the chief princes,” he is in the same class as the other ruling angels. His battle against supernatural evil is described here, in Jude 9, and in Revelation 12. Jesus Christ is not one of several ruling angels; He is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). He is the One of whom it is said, “Let all the angels of God worship Him” (Hebrews 1:6). The angels-and this surely includes the ruling “princes” of Daniel 10-12-are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). They are contrasted with the Son (read Hebrews 1:5-14).

In Revelation 12, the “male child” who is “caught up to God” is Christ. Then, a couple of verses later, Michael and his angels are seen fighting with the dragon and his angels. The text tells us that Michael, not the male child, fought with the dragon. This leaves the clear impression that the “male child” and Michael are two different persons. One cannot use the argument that the name Michael is used because it would seem too unnatural to have a “child” waging war against the dragon, for elsewhere in Revelation the “Lamb” wages war and expresses His wrath. A war-waging, wrathful “lamb” seems every bit as unnatural.

The evidence tips the scales in favor of the view that Michael is not Christ, but is one of the ruling angels who, with other supernatural “princes,” battles the forces of supernatural evil that are at work behind the scenes in this world.

Q Are the “twenty-four elders” of Revelation 4 and 5 supernatural beings who dwell in the presence of God, or are they symbolic representations of the saints? They are seated around God’s throne, they are clothed in white raiment, and they wear crowns of gold (Revelation 4:2-4). These descriptions seem to match descriptions other passages give of the saints (Revelation 2:10; 2:26,27; 3:5; 3:21; 7:9). Doesn’t this indicate that the elders symbolize the saints?

A We believe the elders are supernatural beings who dwell in God’s presence and who, along with the “four living creatures” and myriads of angels, are involved in heavenly worship as well as in God’s purpose on earth. The fact that they are called “elders” does not mean that they are older human beings. Apparently, John refers to them as elders because of their appearance (they look like “elders,” or older men—an appearance that is associated with wisdom) and their office.

There are several reasons for believing that the elders are supernatural beings rather than symbolic representations of the saints.

First, the elders are distinguished from the saints (Revelation 5:8). Second, they are closely associated with the four “living creatures” (verse 8), and appear to be one of three classes of supernatural beings—“elders,” “living creatures,” and “angels”—involved in heavenly worship as well as in God’s purpose on earth (verse 11—see context). Third, the crowns and white clothing do not necessarily indicate human saints. Majesty and holiness (symbolized by crowns of gold and white clothing) are ascribed to supernatural beings as well as to the saints. John saw seven angels “clothed in pure bright linen” (Revelation 15:6). The heavenly hosts are associated with “thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities,” and “powers” (Colossians 1:16). Michael, as “one of the chief princes” (Daniel 10:13; cf. verse 21), is among the beings involved in warfare against the supernatural “principalities and powers” at work behind the scenes (Daniel 10; cf. Colossians 2:15). These descriptions of “princes,” “thrones,” “dominions,” and so on, match the descriptions of the elders with their crowns and their seats of authority. Fourth, the earthly tabernacle (temple) is a pattern of the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9). The twenty-four elders, corresponding to the twenty-four courses of priests, are seen in the priestly role of interceding on behalf of the saints.

At least part of John’s purpose in describing these supernatural beings is to emphasize the worthiness of the Lamb (Revelation 5:6). Of all the heavenly powers, including the awesome and majestic beings who dwell in the very presence of God, only the little Lamb who still bears in His body the sacrificial wound is qualified to strip away the seven seals. It seems that these descriptions (Revelation 4-5) lose their powerful effect (of emphasizing the worthiness of the Lamb) if we view the elders as mere symbolic representations of the saints.

Q In your brochure, *The Seed of Satan*, you give your reasons for rejecting the popular belief that in ancient times rebellious angels had sexual relations with women. Doesn’t Jude 6 and 7 show that certain angels left their former habitation and went after “strange flesh” in much the same way the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah had done? Is this not speaking of unnatural sexual unions?

A The angels who left their “proper domain,” or “former habitation,” were those who followed Satan in his rebellion. In Jude 5-7, Jude compares human apostates with (1) the unbelieving Israelites who were saved from Egypt, (2) the angels who rebelled, and (3) the men of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude was not saying that the angels of verse 6 had “gone after strange flesh” as the Sodomites had done; he was saying that the human apostates (the “certain men” of verse 4) were like Sodom and Gomorrah in that they had “given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh...” (verse 7).

The debate is over whether the “these” of verse 7 are the angels of verse 6 or someone else. Some commentators believe the term refers to Sodom and Gomorrah. They understand verse 7 this way: “as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these [i.e., the nearby cities, similar to these cities-Sodom and Gomorrah], having given themselves over to sexual immorality...”

However, the repeated use of “these” in the text leaves little doubt that the “these” of verse 7 are the “certain men” of verse 4. Notice: “these dreamers” (verse 8); “these speak evil” (verse 10); “These are spots in your love feasts” (verse 12); “These are grumblers” (verse 16); “These are sensual persons” (verse 19).

7. PROPHECY

Q *Zechariah 14:4 is used by many groups to picture the return of Jesus to this earth. The term Lord is used to represent Jesus in the context. Yet, “Lord” is used literally thousands of other times in Scripture (including New Testament quotes from the Old) in reference to the Almighty God, whom Jesus said was His Father. Can you explain?*

A The name Lord, or Yahweh, applies to God the Father throughout the Bible. But this name, like all other divine names and titles, is also used in reference to the second Person of the Godhead—the One who became Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, He is often called the “Angel of the Lord.” The term angel simply means “messenger,” and can refer to created spirit beings, to human messengers, or to the divine manifestations mentioned frequently in the Old Testament.

The “Angel of the Lord” who appeared to Hagar is called “the Lord who spoke to her” and “the-God-Who-Sees” (Genesis 16:7-13). Jacob equated “the God who has fed me all my life” with “the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (Genesis 48:15,16). The “Angel of the Lord” who appeared to Moses in the burning bush identified Himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” and said His name is “I am Who I am” (Exodus 3:2,6,14).

These are just a few of the many scriptural examples showing that the term Lord, or Yahweh, can be used in reference to the Almighty God who dwells in heaven as well as to the Angel (Messenger) who appears on earth and speaks on His behalf.

In Zechariah 12:8, “God” is synonymous with “the Angel of the Lord.” This, along with the examples above, sheds light on Zechariah’s description of the “Lord” who “will go forth and fight,” and whose “feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:3,4). He

is none other than the divine Messenger who always appears, speaks, and acts on behalf of the Heavenly Father. He is the Second Person of the Godhead, the divine Logos (“Word”) who “was with God” and “was God” (John 1:1). He is Jesus Christ!

Q *Some claim that the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-12) indicates that 50 percent of the true church in the end-time will be spiritually asleep and in danger of losing the Holy Spirit. Is this the meaning of the parable?*

A No, it is not. Let’s read the parable in its entirety: “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all [including the “wise” virgins] slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’”

A parable is a story designed to make a point. It is not necessary to assume that each element of the story has a hidden meaning. In the parable of the ten virgins, it is not necessary-or even desirable-to attach meanings to every element in the story. We need not look for hidden meanings in the lamps, or in the oil, or in the slumbering and sleeping of the virgins.

Some have argued that the oil represents the Holy Spirit, while others have argued that it represents good deeds. It need not represent either. It should be seen as merely an element in the story showing that the foolish virgins were unprepared for the unexpected delay of the bridegroom.

To avoid foolish and unnecessary interpretations, the following points should be considered:

First, all the virgins, including the wise ones, slumbered and slept as they awaited the bridegroom. If the virgins represent the entire end-time church, and if their slumber symbolizes spiritual lethargy, then 100 percent of the church will “sleep” right up to the time of Christ’s coming. Obviously, if the virgins’ slumber symbolizes spiritual lethargy, then there would be no wise virgins! All ten would be foolish!

Second, since the Scriptures do not speak of “running out” of, or “running low” on, the Holy Spirit; and since the Holy Spirit is a gift that cannot be bought (Acts 8:18-20), it is extremely unlikely that the oil in this parable represents the Holy Spirit. There is no rule stating that oil must always symbolize the Spirit.

Third, if the parable is a prophecy designed to show that a full 50 percent of the end-time church will fall away and be denied entrance into the Kingdom at the Second Coming, then what happened to free-moral agency? Has the future been predetermined? Is it impossible for 70, 80, or 90 percent of the end-time church to faithfully endure to the

end? Since all true Christians are given full assurance that God will provide everything they need to successfully fulfill their calling (Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 10:13), it is unthinkable that Christ would predict a 50 percent failure rate for the church of the last days.

The best rule to follow in studying a parable is this: Look for the main point of the parable, and don't try to read additional meanings into it. In the parable of the ten virgins, the main point is abundantly clear: Be prepared always, even in the event of an unexpected delay. As with the preceding parables, the theme is preparedness for the coming of the Son of Man (cf. Matthew 24:43-51). Jesus put it this way: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13).

Q *If the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 2,3) were seven actual churches which existed at the time John wrote the book of Revelation, how do you explain the fact that Christ warned the churches at Ephesus, Pergamos, and Sardis that He would come upon them quickly or "as a thief" unless they repented? Didn't Christ know that He would not return at that time? If so, shouldn't we view the seven churches as end-time churches?*

A To the church at Ephesus, Christ said, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-unless you repent" (Revelation 2:5). To the church in Pergamos, Christ warned, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them [the heretical Nicolaitans] with the sword of My mouth" (verse 16). And to the church at Sardis, Christ said, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3).

Christ's repeated warnings about coming quickly have led some to believe that the seven churches are really seven end-time assemblies, but this belief is based on the assumption that the "coming" Christ speaks of in the above passages is the Second Coming.

In this section of Revelation, Christ "walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands," which are identified as the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 2:1; 1:20; 1:4). He is not portrayed as being in heaven preparing to return and establish His Kingdom, so His "coming" in judgment against one of the seven churches should not be seen as His descent from heaven, but simply as His walking over to one of the "lampstands" to deal with the problem.

Q *In Hosea 11:1, God refers to the nation of Israel as His "son" whom He called "out of Egypt." Yet, Matthew applies this verse to an event in the life of Jesus. A minister recently cited this example of prophetic fulfillment as proof that it is a mistake to take the prophecies of the Old Testament literally. He said that without the New Testament, no one would have ever understood the real meaning of Hosea 11:1, and that the real meaning of many Old Testament prophecies (as revealed by Christ and the apostles) "blows the doors off" the literal interpretation. What do you have to say about*

this?

A Hosea 11:1 states, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” The context leaves no doubt that this verse is speaking of the nation of Israel (see verse 2, for example), not of a single individual. Here, Israel is referred to metaphorically as God’s “son.” This type of language is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, and is common to many cultures, including our own. For instance, we often speak of America with terms such as she and her, as if the nation were a woman.

Matthew might seem to say that Hosea 11:1 really means something else (see Matthew 2:13-15), but a careful examination of the two accounts reveals that Matthew’s use of the verse is completely agreeable with the context within which the verse appears. The minister who points to Matthew’s use of Hosea as an example of how the “real” meaning “blows the doors off” the literal interpretation is clearly in error! The real meaning of the passage lies in the passage itself. It simply says that God called Israel out of Egypt—a fact of history. Matthew’s use of the verse does not in any way change its original meaning.

It is important to understand that Matthew is not using the verse as a proof text, but as a pointer to the theme of his source’s larger context: God’s compassion for the object of His love (i.e., His “Son,” whether the multiple seed of Abraham or the single Seed), especially in times of stress, oppression, and opposition.

Notice that God’s love toward His Son is expressed in His sending Him (with Joseph and Mary) into Egypt. Yet, the prophet said God had called His son out of Egypt. How could Christ’s going into Egypt fulfill a statement about being called out of Egypt? Obviously, Matthew was not trying to reveal the “real” meaning of Hosea—or showing how the “real” meaning “blows the doors off” the literal meaning—but was simply pointing to the theme, or principle, underlying Hosea’s comments.

It is certainly true that many prophecies and statements from the Old Testament carry meanings deeper than were recognized by those who first received them. However, the deeper meanings do not cancel the original, literal meanings. If they did, then we can only conclude that Old Testament prophecies and promises do not mean what they say. As Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., rightly notes: “To treat the older Testament merely as a vessel that has little or no content until the interpreter imports Christian meaning from NT texts is demeaning to both the older revelation of God and to those who first heard what they thought was the abiding word of God” (The Uses of the Old Testament in the New, Moody Press, Chicago, 1985, p. 145).

Q *Some scholars claim that the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53 is the nation of Israel personified. The griefs and sorrows the servant bears refer to the severe persecutions the Jewish people have had to endure through the centuries, the Holocaust being the most recent and perhaps most notable example. Proof that Isaiah’s “servant” passages refer to the nation of Israel, not the Messiah, is found in Isaiah 41:8, 44:1, and 49:3, where the servant is called “Israel.” Why do you along with many other Christians believe that the servant passages of the book of Isaiah apply to the Messiah?*

A There can be no doubt that passages such as Isaiah 41:8,9, Isaiah 42:18-22, and Isaiah 44:21,22 speak of the nation of Israel. Isaiah 42:18-22 describes the servant as blind and deaf, “a people plundered and despoiled,” “trapped in caves,” and “hidden away in prisons.” This is a description of backslidden Israel, not the righteous Messiah.

Yet, when we examine all of Isaiah’s servant passages, a poetic portrayal of the ideal Israel emerges. Ideal Israel is not the backslidden nation of the past, but is the obedient nation of the future Messianic reign. In that day, the Messiah will gather the scattered descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into their own land, and God will establish His covenant with them (Jeremiah 31:31; 33:14-16). The reconstituted nation of Israel, under the Messiah’s reign, will become the model nation for all the nations of the world (Isaiah 2:2-4).

It is important to understand that in Scripture a kingdom is sometimes described as having the characteristics of its king. The “head of gold” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image was at once the king of Babylon and the Babylonian kingdom (Daniel 2:31-40). Similarly, descriptions of the ideal Israel, as portrayed in the servant passages, are also descriptions of the nation’s ultimate King and representative Head—the Messiah. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see the transition from kingdom to King, from the nation to the nation’s representative Head, in Isaiah’s servant passages.

Notice, for example, Isaiah 42:1-7: “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law. Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk in it, I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison” (New American Standard Bible).

Notice that the Servant is appointed as “a covenant to the people,” showing that He is distinct from the people. The people are the people of Israel, so the Servant who fulfills the covenant promises cannot be a mere personification of the nation. He must be the Messiah, the Davidic King who will bring the people into their own land and lead them to repentance and obedience.

The above passage also speaks of the Messiah’s two ministries. The first is an unassuming ministry in which the Servant does not cry out or make His voice heard in the street. This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s first coming (compare Matthew 12:14-21). In His second ministry the Servant establishes justice in the earth and declares His law to the coastlands. This aspect of the Servant’s mission will be accomplished during Christ’s millennial reign.

The fact that the Servant is called “Israel” does not necessarily mean that the nation of Israel is being addressed. The name Israel was given to (1) Jacob, the father of the men for whom the tribes of Israel were named, and (2) the tribes collectively. It is appropriate,

then, that the nation's representative Head also be called "Israel." The name itself means "he prevails with God," and was given to Jacob because God allowed the patriarch to overcome Him in a wrestling bout (see Genesis 32:24-28). Jesus Christ is the overcomer par excellence! (See Revelation 3:21; 5:5; 14:14.) How appropriate that He should be called by a name that means "overcomer."

In Isaiah 49:3, the Servant is called "Israel." We know that this passage is speaking of the Messiah because Israel the Servant is clearly distinct from Israel the nation. The Servant's mission is to "bring Jacob back to Him [God], in order that Israel [the nation] might be gathered to Him" (verse 5), to "raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel" (verse 6). It would make no sense whatsoever to say that God formed the nation of Israel in order to bring the nation of Israel back to Him. But it makes perfect sense to say that the mission of Israel the Servant is to bring Israel the nation back to God.

Isaiah 53 is not a personified description of a nation. It is a poetic description, a prophecy, of the suffering Servant of God, the Messiah, who would suffer and lay down His life for our transgressions. He is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Q *Revelation 20:2 says that the devil was bound and prevented from deceiving the nations for 1000 years. You teach that this event has not yet occurred. But doesn't the Bible teach that the devil was bound in the time of Christ and the apostles? See Luke 10:17-19; John 12:31; and Colossians 2:15.*

A The scriptures you cite refer to Christ's victory over Satan and the demonic realm, but none of them suggest that the devil has no more power to deceive the nations. Many New Testament passages show that the devil was by no means bound and shut away during the time of Christ.

Peter warned, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world" (1 Peter 5:8,9, NASB throughout answer).

Paul admonished, "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Paul spoke of the end-time "lawless one" whose coming "is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" (2 Thessalonians 2:9,10).

The book of Revelation shows Satan active throughout Christian history, from the birth of Christ to the Second Coming (see Revelation 12, for example). The devil and his demonic cohorts not only attempt to destroy God's people, but exert a powerful and deceptive influence in the non Christian world (Revelation 2:10; 16:13,14).

These are but a few of the many New Testament passages which show plainly that Satan the devil is alive and well on planet earth. Yet, the centuries-old belief that the binding of Satan occurred before the middle of the first century A.D. is still held by some churches.

Some contend that Revelation 20:1-3 simply means that the devil's influence was to some extent limited following the death and resurrection of Christ. Unfortunately, the

description given in these verses does not fit the “limited influence” or “partly bound devil” scenario. Notice:

“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”

Notice several points: First, the devil is bound with a great chain. Second, he is thrown into the abyss, or “bottomless pit.” Third, the entrance to the abyss is shut and sealed.

Does that sound like the half-bound devil of the “limited influence” theory? Hardly! This is clearly a description of total, out-of-sight/out-of-mind binding! Satan is out of the picture-completely!

Obviously, this has not yet happened. It will happen shortly after the Second Coming of Christ and just before the start of the Millennium, or 1000-year reign of Christ.

The events of Chapter 20-the binding of Satan, the millennial reign, and the White Throne Judgment-follow the events of Chapter 19 chronologically. The Second Coming is described in Chapter 19. Any eschatological scheme that places the binding of Satan before the return of Christ must either deny that the events of these two chapters are in chronological sequence or deny that Chapter 19 depicts the Second Coming.

The “limited influence” theory simply does not stand on firm ground. Nor does any other theory which places the binding of Satan in the past.

Q *Unlike many modern dispensationalists as well as some of the other churches historically related to your church, you do not hold to the belief that the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 represent seven church eras. Since the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, doesn't it seem likely that chapters 2 and 3 are prophetic descriptions of seven church eras?*

A If the messages to the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic, then it seems that all seven would most likely portray the condition of the church during the time of the end-since the book of Revelation is primarily about future conditions and events associated with and including the Day of the Lord. However, since the book of Revelation was for the purpose of providing encouragement and admonition for God's people throughout the ages, we should pay careful attention to what Christ has to say to each of the seven churches, and realize that the admonitions as well as the promises are for all of us.

If the seven churches represent seven church eras, then the burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of those who hold this theory. The book of Revelation itself does not present them as eras, and gives us a good reason for believing that they are not.

It is important to realize that the churches are not presented as symbols. Rather, they are the objects of symbols, and should therefore be accepted as seven literal churches.

Notice: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). The seven

churches are “the seven churches which are in Asia” (verse 4).

Jesus Christ, who reveals the meaning of His own symbols, says that the seven lampstands are the seven churches of Asia. Would we not be most foolish to dogmatically assert that the seven lampstands are something other than seven literal churches in Asia?

When Christ reveals the meaning of a symbol, we should be cautious about considering additional meanings.

Q *The 144,000 are called “firstfruits.” Are they the sum total of the firstfruits? Are they the only ones that truly have God’s Holy Spirit and endured until the end?*

A The 144,000 are called “firstfruits” in Revelation 14: “These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (verses 4,5).

The various descriptions depict the righteousness of these saints. They stand upon and live by the truth. They recognize and reject the defilements of false religion. They have placed their faith in Christ, and follow Him in every aspect of their lives.

The 144,000 are called “firstfruits” because they are a part of the spiritual harvest of firstfruits, or first to enter the Kingdom of God. From the description in Chapter 7, it is clear that the 144,000 are only a part of the firstfruits harvest.

John wrote, “After these things [that is, after seeing the 144,000 from “all the tribes of the children of Israel,” verse 4] I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number; of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (verses 9,10).

Like the 144,000 Israelites, this great multitude from all nations is “before the throne of God” (verse 15). These “are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14).

Both groups, the 144,000 and the great multitude, make their appearance after the Great Tribulation and just before the Day of the Lord (compare verse 15 with verses 1-3). The entire company is converted during, and as a result of, the Great Tribulation. So, no, the 144,000 are not the only ones who will have or receive the Holy Spirit during the last days of this age.

8. THE ‘LAST THINGS’

Q *Second Kings 2:11 states that Elijah “went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” Yet, in John 3:13, Jesus says that no one “has ascended to heaven,” and in Acts 2:34, Peter says that King David “did not ascend into the heavens.” Can you explain this*

seeming contradiction?

A The answer lies in understanding the different ways in which the Bible uses the word heaven. The dwelling place of God is called “heaven” (Matthew 5:16,34,45; 6:1,9; 7:11,21; Revelation 4). This was the “heaven” Jesus had in mind when He said, “No one has ascended to heaven...” (John 3:13). Generally, however, the word simply refers to the sky, whether within or outside the earth’s atmosphere. The birds fly in “heaven” (Genesis 1:20), and the sun, moon, and stars are in “heaven” (Genesis 1:14-17).

Elijah was taken into the sky, but not into the place of God’s dwelling. No doubt, the whirlwind was the means God used in transporting Elijah from one geographical location to another-just as an airplane takes us from one place to another. There is no reason to believe that Elijah stayed in the sky once the whirlwind took him up. The letter from Elijah to King Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:12-15) appears to have been written after the whirlwind incident (though this is inconclusive). If so, then Elijah was obviously on the earth at that time.

Q *What did Jesus mean when He said, “I go to prepare a place for you”? Some people claim this supports the view that Christians go to heaven.*

A In John 14:1-3, Jesus says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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.”

Since Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, and since God the Father dwells in heaven, we might safely assume that the “Father’s house” of which Jesus spoke is in heaven. Moreover, since Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,” we might safely assume that the “place” He is preparing is in the Father’s house in heaven.

But notice that Jesus did not say that His followers would go to heaven and take up residence in the new mansions He had prepared for them. On the contrary, He said, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Jesus will receive His saints when He comes again-not before! He will establish His kingdom right here on this earth, and the saints will reign with Him (Revelation 2:26,27; 3:21; 5:10).

The term translated “mansions” is better rendered “rooms,” “abodes,” or “chambers.” The Father’s house, Jesus says, has many rooms, and He is now preparing a place for His disciples, but they will not take up residence in their new place until the Father’s house-the Father’s dwelling place-comes to this earth.

Jesus promises, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God” (Revelation 3:12).

The apostle John saw the New Jerusalem in a vision. He wrote, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people.

God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:2,3).

Notice that the dwelling place of God-the “Father’s house”-will be located here on this earth.

Q *Doesn’t Paul say that to be “absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord”? If, then, a Christian dies and is “absent from the body,” is he not immediately (and consciously) “present with the Lord”?*

A The expressions “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord” are found in 2 Corinthians 5:6,8. In the preceding verses, Paul speaks of the present mortal condition and the future glorified state. The mortal body is described as “our earthly house” (verse 1), “this tent” (verses 1,4), and our present “home” (verse 6). These descriptions are contrasted with the everlasting “building from God,” or “house not made with hands” (verse 1), which is “our habitation which is from heaven” (verse 2) with which we shall be “clothed” (verses 2-4).

A person who is “absent from the body” has put off the present clothing. He will remain “naked” (verse 3), or “unclothed” (verse 4), until he is “further clothed” (verse 4) with his “building,” “house,” or “habitation” from heaven. At that time, he will be “present with the Lord.”

Both the present mortality and the future immortality are described in terms of “clothing.” The mortal body a person occupies is his present clothing. His future clothing is the immortal body he will obtain at the resurrection, which takes place at the Second Coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:21-23,50-55; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). He is “naked,” or “unclothed,” between death and resurrection. Therefore, Paul did not mean that a person who is “absent from the body” is immediately and consciously “present with the Lord.”

In his previous epistle to the Corinthian believers, Paul wrote, “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 [who are alive] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). When will this occur? In the future, “at His coming” (verse 23).

Compare this with what Paul said to the same church in his next epistle: “For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:4).

It is inconceivable that in one epistle Paul links putting on immortality with the future resurrection, but in the other epistle he links putting on immortality with “going to heaven” at death. If Christians are clothed with immortality, or “swallowed up by life,” shortly after death, what is so glorious about the future resurrection?

Q *The book of Genesis says that God created man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Another scripture says that we should not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but only God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. What does this mean?*

A The Hebrew term *nephesh*, translated “soul” in the Old Testament, generally means “being,” but has several nuances of meaning. Genesis 2:7 states, “And the Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” The term translated “being” (“soul” in the KJV) in no way indicates immortality. The same term is translated “creature” in Genesis 1:24 and 2:19, and refers to the animals God had created. The term refers to the essence of life in 1 Kings 17:21,22.

The Greek term translated “soul” in the New Testament is *psuche*. Greek translators used this term in translating the Hebrew *nephesh*.

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus states, “And 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.” This passage shows clearly that the “soul,” however one defines it, can be destroyed. Both body and soul can be destroyed in *Gehenna* (translated “hell” here), which is the consuming fire that will completely destroy all the incorrigibly wicked in the Day of Judgment. There will be no resurrection for those who are destroyed in *Gehenna*.

Men can kill, but cannot prevent God from raising their victims to life again. Only God can destroy permanently, and He will do it only for the incorrigibly wicked. This does not mean, however, that a person remains conscious after death. Rather, it means simply that, after death, individual identity is preserved and remains in an unconscious state until the resurrection.

Some expositors make an artificial distinction between “kill” and “destroy” in this verse. They claim that the latter means “reduce to ruin,” which implies a state of misery rather than annihilation. However, since the point is that God, who is able to destroy both soul and body, is being contrasted with men, who are able to kill only the body, it is obvious that “kill” and “destroy” are used synonymously here. To destroy a soul is to kill it. Since it can be killed, it is not immortal. Luke’s parallel account adds clarity to Matthew’s rendition: “And I say unto 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).

This is simply another way of saying that men are unable to take away a person’s life forever. Only God can do that.

Q (1) *If body plus breath equals soul (Genesis 2:7), then how would you explain Matthew 10:28 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23? (2) If no one goes to heaven, then where is the place Jesus is preparing in John 14:3? (3) The Bible says we will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). After that, where are we going? Besides, what is “the air”? Is it another name for heaven? Are we going to remain in the air forever?*

A (1) The term translated “soul” in the New Testament does not always mean “body plus breath of life.” That definition is too restrictive. The term is *psuche*, and can refer to the natural life of the body (Matthew 2:20), the immaterial part of a person (Matthew 10:28), the seat of emotion, perception, and self-awareness (Matthew 11:29), the inner man (1 Peter 2:11), and so on. The term has a wide range of meanings-

similar to our word “soul”: “He has soul.” “There were forty souls aboard.” “I felt that in the depths of my soul.” “The soul leaves the body at death.”

The Hebrew and Greek terms translated “soul” (Greek: *psuche*; Hebrew: *nephesh*) do not always refer to a living being. The Bible speaks of “dead souls,” both of men and of animals (Numbers 6:6; Leviticus 24:18).

The expression “spirit, soul, and body” (1 Thessalonians 5:23) refers to the whole person-life, limb, and personality-but should not be understood as a precise analysis of the human composition. One could just as well speak of “heart, mind, soul, spirit, and body” as a way of emphasizing the whole person. These terms carry a variety of nuances, and most overlap in meaning to some extent. When used in combination, they should be understood as simply a way of speaking of the whole person, but need not be broken down into precise categories.

The words translated “soul” (*psuche*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*) have overlapping meanings, and can, to some extent, be used interchangeably. Both can refer to the inner person, but neither is restricted to this meaning.

(2) In John 14:3, Jesus is speaking of His ascension to heaven, where He will prepare a “place” for His disciples. But He says nothing about His disciples going to heaven to enter the place He is preparing. Rather, He says, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). Later, John sees a vision of “the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). The holy city, New Jerusalem, is the future dwelling place of the saints. It is being prepared in heaven, but will come down from heaven to this earth in God’s own time.

(3) First Thessalonians 4:17 tells us that true disciples of Jesus will meet the returning Christ “in the air.” The “air” is the atmosphere. As Christ descends through the earth’s atmosphere, the resurrected and transformed saints will rise to meet Him. They will then follow Christ in His descent to the earth. “And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east...” (Zechariah 14:4).

9. THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

Q *What is the commission Jesus Christ gave to His church?*

A The church’s commission is stated concisely by Jesus Christ Himself: “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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20).

The disciples of Jesus, as eyewitnesses of His resurrection, were to make new disciples by proclaiming the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel [good news] to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The

life-changing message they were to proclaim centers on the resurrection of Jesus, and calls for a radical change of behavior on the part of its hearers. "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46,47). Christ said He would be with His true followers "to the end of the age." The work of the church goes on; the commission is the same.

Christ gave the church only one commission, though the one commission involves ministries, or services, that vary. To accomplish the commission, God "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). The primary job of apostles and evangelists is proclaiming the gospel to the world as a witness; pastors and teachers provide instruction and guidance for the assemblies that are formed as a result of the work of the apostles and evangelists. These all differ somewhat in function, but share the common mission of making-start to finish-disciples for the Kingdom of God.

Notice that the commission includes "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." This is an ongoing job; it doesn't end with baptism and the laying-on-of-hands. "Making disciples" includes the preaching that initially brings individuals to conversion, as well as the ongoing instruction in sound biblical doctrine and godly living.

Christ's three-fold command, "Feed My lambs....Tend My sheep....Feed My sheep," was given to Peter, but applied to all the apostles and overseers (John 21:15-17; cf. 1 Peter 5:1-4). "Feed My sheep" is synonymous with "Go therefore and make disciples." These commands of Jesus are not two distinct commissions, but different ways of speaking of the one commission.

Jesus used the shepherd-sheep analogy in describing His ongoing work of making disciples for the Kingdom of God. He said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14-16).

The church, with its diversity of gifts, is the agency through which the Good Shepherd calls to, and feeds, His sheep.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:11-16, New International Version).

Q *Since you are not watching world events, are you going to fail to notice when the pope sets up his new headquarters in Jerusalem, and when Germany begins to flex its muscles in Europe?*

A No, we certainly will not fail to notice when events such as the ones you describe take place. If the pope announces to the world that the “new Vatican” is in Jerusalem-or even if he says that he’s thinking about moving the Catholic Church’s headquarters to Jerusalem-you can rest assured that we will be paying attention.

Probably, your reference to “watching world events” alludes to comments we have made about “headline theology,” or the practice of trying to read prophetic fulfillments into daily news events, in relation to Jesus’s command to “Watch therefore...” (Luke 21:36). It’s good to watch world events, and all of us should, but that’s not the meaning of this passage; nor is it the primary function of the church and its leadership, as some seem to think.

There are dozens of magazines and newsletters, most published by Protestant evangelicals, centering on the “watch world events” theme. Some of them connect every new natural disaster with biblical prophecy, and either imply or state outright that certain news items-the pope’s visit to Cuba, El Niño, flesh-eating bacteria, and so on-are part of a chain of events leading directly to the tribulation of the end of this age. The problem is that decade after decade of connecting current events with end-time prophecy tends to create a “boy who cried wolf” syndrome.

Don’t misunderstand! Some of the items we read of in the daily headlines may have prophetic significance-but then, maybe they don’t. The truth is, we don’t know for sure whether El Niño or the pope’s latest visit are prophetically significant-so to state dogmatically that these things definitely are prophetically significant would be nothing less than irresponsibility on our part!

Supposedly, the aim of the publications carrying the “watch world events” theme is to help people realize that time is short and they need to repent. That’s fine. But, unfortunately, a long history of failed speculations tends to drive people in the other direction. If bringing people to repentance is the aim, why not cut to the chase and tell them they need to repent? After all, no matter who you are, you could die at any moment! Even if you don’t, your days are numbered, so to speak, because you are mortal. And once you die, your next moment of consciousness will quickly bring you to the realization that Judgment Day has arrived (Hebrews 9:27)! El Niño won’t be quite so important then!

We are going to continue teaching that turbulent times are predicted for the end of the age, and that we need to always be spiritually prepared for the times ahead, but we firmly believe that issuing warnings about coming calamities is not the only way to help people see the necessity of repentance.

The risen Christ said, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46,47).

To repent of their sins, people have to know what sin is. They have to be taught that sin is the transgression of God’s holy and righteous law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, we must provide television programs, sermons, articles, and booklets on the Ten Commandments, on the ongoing validity of God’s law, on the Sabbath and holy days, and on false doctrines

concerning the so-called “Old Testament law.”

To have their sins forgiven, people have to know who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished in His earthly ministry. Therefore, we must provide material on the divinity and humanity of Christ, on His sacrificial and redemptive work, on the prophecies concerning Him, and on His example and teachings.

Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The “all things” Jesus commanded includes far more than the things He commanded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In fact, Jesus had much to say about ethics, morality, godliness, and the like, but relatively little to say about famines and earthquakes and other such disasters. A word study with your concordance will quickly prove this.

Based on these words of Jesus, we firmly believe that the commission He gives us involves much teaching on a wide range of subjects-prophecy included.

We occasionally speak of prophetic possibilities where certain world events are concerned, but we believe it is vitally important to let our readers and listeners know that we may have far less time than world events might seem to indicate. On the other hand, we believe it is important to let our readers and listeners know that we may have more time than we think. In other words:

“WATCH therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42).

10. DIVINE NAMES AND TITLES

Q *What is the name of the Sovereign Father? Jeremiah 23:25-27 states: “I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.” What name?...Romans 10:13 is Paul quoting from Joel 2:32, [which says:] “[W]hoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What name is to be called if you do not know the name of the Eternal Infinite One?*

A God has many names and titles, but the name most often used in the Old Testament is Yahweh (pronounced variously). Precisely how the names and titles of God are pronounced is far less important than the meaning of each name. “Sacred names” advocates who profess to follow the Messiah should pay particular attention to the model prayer He gave to His first disciples (see Matthew 6:9-13). While the model prayer includes “Hallowed be Your name,” no particular name is mentioned-not even once! Jesus simply instructs His followers to address God as “Our

Father in heaven.”

Jeremiah 23:25-27, like other Scriptures that speak of God’s name, is not about a particular sound, but about reputation. The false prophets were claiming that their “prophecies” were from the true God. They were acting “in God’s name”; but here, acting in the name of God does not mean pronouncing a certain sound-whether “Yahweh,” “El Shaddai,” “Elohim,” “Eternal,” or “God”-but claiming God’s authority for the act.

The ancestors of the people had forgotten God’s name for Baal. This means that they stopped worshiping the true God and worshiped Baal instead. Again, the sound of a particular name was not the issue.

Interestingly, those who use Jeremiah 23:25-27 as a proof text for their “sacred names” doctrine point out that the lying prophets had caused the people to forget the Creator’s name. Unfortunately, they tend to ignore the fact that the lying prophets were prophesying in His name! If “My name” is a matter of pronouncing a particular sound, how could the false prophets speak in God’s name and, at the same time, cause people to forget His name? Obviously, the phrase “My name,” which appears three times in this passage, has nothing to do with whether the particular name “Yahweh” is pronounced.

Q *I appreciate your answer to the question on God’s name. However, your answer begins with the position that God has many names and titles. I agree that the Sovereign Father has many titles, which is very obvious. But I have a problem with “many names,” especially in view of the Tetragrammaton YHWH used over 6000 times in the Old Testament. It seems that the Jews, who used many titles-God, Lord, Elohim, Adonay, etc., etc.-for their God, must have known that their God had a personal name, YHWH, which they held sacred. Could you elaborate on this subject?*

A It is true that YHWH (pronounced variously: *Yahweh*, *Yahoweh*, *Jehovah*, etc.) is the name most often used of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that most other terms used in reference to the Deity are titles describing one or more of His divine attributes. The name YHWH is also descriptive of God’s nature, but there is some uncertainty as to what its original meaning conveyed to ancient Israel. Some scholars feel the term simply means “Eternal,” or “Ever-living One.” Others, however, believe that the term conveys covenantal faithfulness-that is, the God of Israel is everlastingly faithful to His covenant. Taken either way, the point is that the name YHWH is, in one sense, a title.

The Hebrew word translated “name” is *sem*. There appears to be no distinction between name and title in Hebrew. One could rightly say that YHWH is God’s name, but one could also rightly say that YHWH is one of the Creator’s titles. Many such titles, or names, may be rightly used in reference to the true God. Scripture reveals that “The Lord God of Hosts [*Yahweh Elohe-seva Of*] is His name” (Amos 4:13). “Holy” is another name, or title, that belongs to God. Isaiah 57:15 states, “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy [*Qados*].”

We know that the Messiah’s name is Jesus (*Yeshua*, or *Yahshua*). But we’re told in Isaiah 9:6 that “his name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The Hebrew word *sem* (rendered “name”) can be used of any term that describes the character, fame, and attributes of the person to whom that particular term pertains.

Jesus tells His followers how to address the Heavenly Father, and shows that God's name can be hallowed without using a Hebrew term (see Matthew 6:9).

11. MISCELLANEOUS

Q *In Matthew 16:28, Jesus tells His disciples that some of them would not taste death before seeing Him come in His Kingdom (see also Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27). What, specifically, is Jesus saying?*

A Some few think that Matthew 16:28 and its parallels teach that Jesus thought He would return before all the apostles died. Others think “coming in His kingdom” is a reference to Christ’s “coming in judgment” against Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Some commentators believe this saying of Christ was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. None of these views are adequate.

Let’s read this verse in its proper context:

“[Jesus said,] ‘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.’ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him” (Matthew 16:28-17:3).

Verse 9 tells us that this was a “vision.” It was a vision of the Kingdom of God! It was by means of this vision that “some standing here”-Peter, James, and John-were able to “see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” The Transfiguration was a preview of the kingdom, with Christ appearing in His glory.

Some object on grounds that the phrase “shall not taste death” is an extraordinary way of referring to an event that would take place within a few days. Remember, however, that Jesus had just been talking about His own death and about the high cost of discipleship: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” To encourage them, Jesus points out that before being called upon to lay down their lives, some of them would see (by way of vision) the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Q *The book of Jude speaks of angels who “left their own abode,” and of a dispute between Michael the archangel and the devil over “the body of Moses.” Some say that these examples come from two ancient sources, one called the Book of Enoch and the other called the Assumption of Moses. Did Jude rely on these works? Did he consider them inspired texts?*

A Many modern commentaries either imply or state outright that Jude depended upon the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses in his references to sinning angels and Satan’s dispute with Michael over the body of Moses. However, the similarities between the book of Jude and any apocryphal

and pseudepigraphical works do not prove that Jude depended upon these sources or accepted them as inspired texts. He was no doubt familiar with them, and may have adapted descriptions found within them for his own use, but he was by no means citing them as authoritative. Similarly, the apostle Paul quoted pagan poets, but we are not to assume that Paul's use of pagan sources (Acts 17:28) lends support to the idea that the poets he quoted had written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It should be understood that the legends found in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works are often founded upon older traditions, some of which contain elements of truth. Rather than assume that Jude was depending upon the Book of Enoch, why not rather assume that Jude and the writer of Enoch were citing a common tradition? Some of the information given by Enoch is true, and Jude, writing under inspiration (and with an understanding of what was true and what was not), makes good use of that information. It should be pointed out, however, that there are some variations between Jude's and Enoch's descriptions. This may suggest that Jude's similar wording indicates his familiarity with the apocryphal work, but does not indicate that he was citing it directly.

The same may be said of the similarities between Jude and the Assumption of Moses. Jude knew of the dispute between Michael and Satan, and, like the writer of Assumption, refers to that event. However, nothing in Jude's text indicates that he accepted the legends that had grown up around the fact-legends such as the bodily assumption of Moses into heaven.

Q *Matthew 1:1-16 gives the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Verse 17 states, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations." There seems to be a missing generation in the second group of fourteen. Can you explain?*

A Expositors have proposed a number of solutions, but none of them can be proven beyond the shadow of a doubt. Here's one way of solving the problem: In Hebrew, the numerical value of "David" is fourteen. David is included twice—at the end of the first group and beginning of the second—thus bringing the number of generations in the second group to fourteen. The three groups of fourteen emphasize David's number. This emphasis on David points to the Davidic King—the Messiah—prophesied in Scripture (Jeremiah 23:5). This is Matthew's way of saying that He has arrived.

Q *What is the meaning of 1 Peter 3:19,20? It says, "By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison. Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited..." Who are the "spirits in prison," and what did Jesus preach to them?*

A First Peter 3:18-20 states, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 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.”

Some have taken this passage to mean that the preincarnate Christ preached to fallen angels in the days of Noah, and that because they rejected His message, they are now in prison. Others have taken “spirits in prison” to mean the imprisoned souls of wicked humans who lived in the time of Noah. The first interpretation is doubtful on grammatical grounds; the second is doctrinally unsound, for the Bible does not teach the doctrine of the “immortality of the soul.”

The “spirits in prison” are undoubtedly fallen angels who are in some manner confined to certain boundaries, and whose disobedience was evident in the time of Noah, but it is doubtful that Christ’s proclamation to them occurred in the pre-Flood period.

The phrase “by the Spirit” is probably best rendered “in the spirit,” as in the Revised Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible. Christ died “in the flesh” and was resurrected “in the spirit.” The phrase “in the flesh” refers to His pre-resurrection state; the phrase “in the spirit” refers to His post-resurrection state. The words “by whom” are rendered “in which” in both the RSV and the NASB. The phrase refers to the state in which Christ “went and preached to the spirits in prison.”

Christ, then, died in the flesh and was made alive in the spirit, in which state (the resurrected state) He preached to the spirits. He did not preach a message of salvation to the spirits, as some have supposed. Rather, He “preached,” or proclaimed, His sovereign Lordship to them. Just a few verses later, Peter says that Christ “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22). Notice that His resurrection to a new state of existence is associated with His authority over “angels and authorities.” It makes sense, then, that His proclamation to the fallen angels was made after He was resurrected.

The following paraphrase captures the essential meaning of 1 Peter 3:18-20: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death as a human being, He was brought to life in a transformed state of existence completely free of the limitations of mortal human life. In this new state of existence, the resurrected Lord proclaimed His sovereign Lordship to the spirits in confinement—the fallen angels whose disobedience was evident in the days of Noah.”

Christ proclaimed His Lordship to the confined spirits, just as He has since proclaimed His Lordship to many through the preaching of the gospel, and just as He will ultimately proclaim His Lordship to all creation.

Q *What did Paul mean when he spoke of being “baptized for the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:29)?*

A Some among the Corinthians were claiming that there is no resurrection from the dead. As part of his response, Paul asks, “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).

Expositors have offered numerous interpretations of the unusual words “baptized for the dead.” Some have argued that this phrase could be translated “baptized in view of the dead,” which would roughly coincide with the baptismal portrait of the burial of the

spiritually dead “old man” and the raising to life of the “new man in Christ.” Others claim that the strange expression refers to new members being baptized to replace members who have died. However, these explanations lack solid textual support.

The most likely interpretation is that some among the Corinthian heretics were being baptized on behalf of deceased loved ones who had not received baptism during their lifetimes. Paul does not condone the practice; he merely notes the fact that some were doing it. His point is that if they do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, then it makes no sense for some of their number to practice baptism for the dead.

Q *Considering Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, 4:11, and other scriptures about prophets' position in the New Testament, what is the Church of God International's position about prophets in the New Testament?*

A The scriptures you cite show beyond the shadow of a doubt that there were prophets in the apostolic church. The term prophet sometimes refers to a seer, or person who foretells future events. Agabus was such a prophet (Acts 11:28).

However, the term, as it is used in the New Testament, usually refers to an inspired preacher. The prophet's (preacher's) inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit, but usually does not involve divine disclosures apart from what is revealed in Scripture. Rather, it involves the ability to comprehend Scripture and expound its message clearly.

Paul wrote, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” (1 Corinthians 14:3). This reflects the usual sense of “prophesying” in the apostolic church. Through supernatural illumination, certain persons had special insights into the Scriptures and were able to convey their understanding effectively, thus providing edification, exhortation, and comfort to the church. Their gift was also used as an evangelistic tool in bringing sinners to repentance and conversion.

Q *David and other men of God in the Old Testament had multiple wives and concubines. Does this mean that God approves of polygamy?*

A The Bible nowhere upholds polygamy as a legitimate practice. God's will is expressed not only in the specific commandments of the law but in His creative acts as well. For example, Jesus shows how God's will regarding marriage and divorce is expressed in the Creation account. Compare Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:20-24 with Matthew 19:3-6. Notice that the Genesis account of man's creation does not explicitly say that divorce is contrary to the will of God. Yet, Jesus said, “Have you not read...,” indicating that one should be able to understand from the account that marriage is a God-ordained institution and that divorce is contrary to God's will. Further, no explicit commandments regarding marital roles are found in the Genesis account, but Paul informs us that God's will in this matter is reflected in the creation order (1 Corinthians 11:3,8; 1 Timothy 2:12,13). As for God's will regarding polygamy, the implicit teaching of the Genesis account is clear. God gave Adam only the one wife. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife [not wives], and they [the two of them-see Matthew 19:5] shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

The monogamous ideal is reflected in numerous Old Testament passages. The wife of a man who fears God “shall be like a fruitful vine” (Psalm 128:3). A man should rejoice with the wife of his youth, and “always be enraptured with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-20). God speaks strongly against dealing treacherously with the “wife of your youth,” who is “your companion and your wife by covenant” (Malachi 2:14,15). Note the singular in each reference.

Jesus said, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery” (Luke 16:18). Are we to assume that if a man stays married to his wife and yet marries another, he does not commit adultery? (The question is deliberately absurd, but makes the point nevertheless.)

Some have objected to the view that polygamy did not have God’s full approval in the Old Testament. The following are some of the most common objections:

Objection 1: David and other men of God practiced polygamy and concubinage.

Reply: While their cultural situation may “excuse” them to some extent, the fact remains that polygamy never was in accord with the good and perfect will of God. Scriptural narratives of the ancient men of God reveal many sins. The writers rarely paused to moralize, so we are often left with the impression that certain sins were somehow less than sinful.

Objection 2: Exodus 21:7-11 permits polygamy.

Reply: In verse 10, the term translated “duty of marriage” (KJV) should be rendered “oil” or “ointments.” The passage says that if a man buys a female servant with intentions of marrying her, but then changes his mind, he is to continue providing for her.

Objection 3: Leviticus 18:18 and Deuteronomy 21:15-17 assume the existence of polygamy.

Reply: True, but neither passage expresses divine approval of the practice. Deuteronomy 18:18 acknowledges the existence of prostitution, but does not imply divine approval.

Objection 4: Second Samuel 12:7,8 says that God gave David the wives of Saul.

Reply: This passage says that what was once Saul’s is now David’s. Nowhere are Saul’s two wives found in the lists of David’s wives. He took them into his safe-keeping and provided for them, but there is no indication that they became his wives.

Objection 5: In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul says that a bishop must be “the husband of one wife.” This implies that polygamy existed and was practiced even within the church.

Reply: First, Roman law did not permit polygamy. Second, the Greek expression for “husband of one wife” literally means “one-woman man.” Paul is telling Timothy that church leaders should not be womanizers.

Q *I have tried to understand the meaning of the phrase “in the sides of the north” in Isaiah 14:13. I have read the surrounding verses and have some ideas, but I am not sure. Can you help me?*

A Isaiah 14:13 is part of a “proverb [“taunt”-NIV] against the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 14:4), and part of the larger “oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw” (Isaiah 13:1, NIV). The verse reads, “For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on

the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north.”

The latter part of the verse may be rendered this way: “I will also sit in the mountain assembly in the farthest north.” In the ancient world, it was commonly believed that a mountain assembly for the gods was located in the farthest north. However, the phrase “sides of the north” refers to Zion, the holy mountain and city of God, in Psalm 48:2. It is likely that the verse refers to both ideas since the passage is about an individual who seeks to elevate himself above all that is worshiped.

The entire passage (verses 4-21) is a poetic description of the prideful self-exaltation of the king of Babylon. In the backdrop is the pattern of pride and vanity that caused Satan to become the devil. The point of verse 13 is that “Lucifer” (verse 12), because of his ever-swelling pride, sought to exalt himself and his throne above all other principalities and powers. “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,” he says in his heart; “I will be like the Most High” (verse 14).

Q *If Joseph was not Jesus’s real father, why is his (Joseph’s) genealogy from David given and not Mary’s? We have no way of knowing if Mary was of Davidic descent or not.*

A Matthew 1:16 tells us that Jacob was Joseph’s father, while Luke 3:23 says that Eli was Joseph’s father. Even a cursory examination of Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies of Jesus reveals clearly that these are two different genealogies. Apparently, Joseph was Jacob’s son by birth, and Eli’s son by marriage. Eli, then, was the father of Mary, the wife of Joseph. Matthew 1:6 and Luke 3:32 reveal that both Joseph and Mary were David’s descendants.

Q *Did Jesus speak in parables in order to deliberately conceal the truth from certain people?*

A Parables enhance the understanding of those who earnestly seek God’s will, but remain a mystery to those whose minds have been darkened by the deceitfulness of sin. God does not arbitrarily conceal the truth from anyone. It is concealed only from those who have shut their eyes and ears, spiritually speaking. However, if at any time they turn to God in repentance and seek His will, He will remove the blinders and lead them to greater understanding. When this happens, the parables of Jesus will benefit them enormously.

When His disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, Jesus replied, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says:

“You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their

ears, and understand with their heart, and turn to me to heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:10-17, Revised Standard Version).

Knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God "has not been given" to certain people because their "heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed."

The parables of Jesus are not the cause of spiritual blindness. They conceal truth in the sense that they are indiscernible to those who have closed their own eyes. Jesus knew that divine secrets presented in the form of metaphors would hardly be understood by those insensible to spiritual things.

Q *I have read in several published works that Jesus was not born on December 25, but rather on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Is this what your church teaches?*

A While it is not possible to be certain about the time of Christ's birth, several reasonable arguments in favor of the fall of the year have been made. According to one argument, the priestly service of Zacharias (who would father John the Baptist) very likely took place in June. This is based upon the fact that he was "of the division of Abijah" (Luke 1:5), which was the eighth division in line of service, and the assumption that the first division began serving in the first month (spring) of the calendar. Each division served for eight days, from one Sabbath to the next. Assuming that John the Baptist was conceived within a short time after Zacharias returned home (see Luke 1:23,24), and that Zacharias's service occurred in early June, we may place John's birth in the early spring. Since Jesus was born six months after John (Luke 1:24-26,36), we may place the birth of Christ in the fall, which is the time of year the Feast of Tabernacles occurs.

The argument seems plausible, but you will notice that it partly depends upon at least two assumptions: that Zacharias served in June, and that John was conceived immediately after Zacharias returned home. While a fall birth is likely, the uncertainties make it impossible to pinpoint the precise time of Christ's birth.

If Christ was born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, it seems odd that none of the Evangelists mention it. They clearly associate the death of Christ with the Passover (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13,18), and the coming of the Holy Spirit with the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The fact that the Feast of Tabernacles is not mentioned in either birth narrative gives no support to the theory that Christ was born during the feast. If His birth occurred on the first day of the feast, or at any time during the feast, it seems particularly odd that even Luke's detailed account makes no mention of it.

Q *The book of Genesis says that when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, God said, "Man has become like Us, knowing good and evil." If God has existed forever, where did the evil that God knows and presumably has always known come from? If God is the sole Creator, did He create evil? If so, why?*

A God did not create evil; He created the potential for evil. He made creatures capable of choosing whether they would obey Him. Evil entered the picture when the first choice to disobey God was made.

After Adam and Eve took the forbidden fruit and were punished as a result. God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil (Genesis 3:22). Previous to this sin, the serpent had told the woman that eating the forbidden fruit would not result in death, but would cause them to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (verses 4,5).

The irony is that man was already "like God" (Genesis 1:26), but, under the devil's influence, he sought more than was rightfully his. By eating the forbidden fruit, man took upon himself the divine prerogative of deciding what is good and what is evil.

In the Creation narrative, God exercises His divine prerogative when He declares that His creative work is "good." On the first day of Creation Week, He "saw the light, that it was good" (Genesis 1:4). On the third day, He made the dry land appear, and "saw that it was good" (verse 10). Throughout the account, God sees that His creative work is good (verses 11,12,18,21,25,31).

Later, after being warned that eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would result in death, the woman, influenced by Satan, "saw that the [forbidden] tree was good for food" (Genesis 3:6). By eating the forbidden fruit, the woman and her husband became "like God" in the sense that they had taken to themselves the divine prerogative of deciding what is good. They had declared that which was deadly (and expressly forbidden) to be good.

Q *You say that God did not create evil. Doesn't this contradict Isaiah 45:7, which clearly states that God creates evil?*

A The problem lies in the definition of the term "evil." The term can refer to (1) ungodly behavior, or to (2) calamities that befall individuals, groups, and nations.

In Isaiah 45:7, God does not say that He is the Author of ungodliness. The New King James Version correctly translates the verse as follows: "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity, I, the Lord, do all these things."

God brings calamity upon ungodly men, but He does not make men ungodly.

The kind of evil God does not create is mentioned in James 1:13-15: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when

he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

God gave humankind the power to choose whether to obey Him. He therefore created the potential for ungodly (evil) behavior, but is not the Author of ungodliness.

The End

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