

Making Sense of the World
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Introduction

We all recognize there is something wrong with the world and mankind. Our news channels never fail to keep us up to date on all that is destructive, harmful, or bad in society. If they are not telling us about some political scandal, they are surely informing us about the atrocities of war, crime, racism, murder, pollution, dangerous viruses, poverty, social inequality, or some other crisis that never seems to go away. Every time I turn on the news I am reminded of the adage, “If it bleeds, it leads.” Furthermore, the ABC’s of news organizations—like all secular institutions—will offer **Anything But Christian** solutions. Their operating assumptions are either God does not exist (atheism), or does not care to be involved in the affairs of mankind (deism), so we are left to ourselves to slug it out and find our own solutions to life’s problems. The constant internalization of negative news—albeit true—without some biblical context or divine solution only serves to create psychological and emotional disequilibrium, which, if left unmanaged, can cause lasting damage to self and others. Without divine revelation to provide proper context, we can become mentally miscalibrated. So, what are we to do? There is an answer in the Bible, which provides us an explanation concerning why the world is the way it is, how we should respond to it, and what the future holds. That is what this series of lessons will address. Below is a basic outline of topics:

1. The Bible as God’s Word – This study will help us realize the Bible is divine revelation and trustworthy concerning subjects about God, Satan, Adam and Eve, divine institutions, the beginning and end of evil, and how we should live as Christians.
2. The Person and attributes of God – This study will help us start with the Person and character of God, which will provide an absolute reference point for right and wrong. If there is no God, and no written revelation of His character and will, then men are left only with their conflicting opinions and there is no final arbiter to determine what is right or what is wrong. However, God has spoken in the Bible, and what He says about men and their actions is the final basis for correct thinking concerning morals and behavior. Furthermore, He created an open universe in which He continually operates in every detail, involving Himself in people’s lives, directing history for His glory.
3. The existence angelic beings. Angels—both holy and evil—play an active role in the world in which we live, and it helps to be aware of what they’re doing.
4. The fall of Satan. This will help us understand how sin and evil got started, where it’s going, and what Satan’s agenda for the world is.

5. The expansion of Satan's kingdom of darkness. The fall of Adam and Eve expanded Satan's kingdom of darkness, which is where the majority of humanity resides, enslaved to his policies. Satan is regarded as the ruler of this world, and his policies predominate over the affairs of mankind.
6. The fall of Adam and Eve. The Bible treats Adam and Eve as real persons, and regards their historical fall into sin as the reason sin and death were introduced into the world.
7. The effects of sin.
8. The divine institutions. According to Scripture, God created four foundational institutions that are for individual blessing and national stability. The four divine institutions are:
 - A. Responsible Dominion
 - B. Marriage
 - C. Family
 - D. Human Government
9. Positive and negative volition among people. People are either positive or negative to God, the gospel, and Scripture. These opposite poles in the soul determines which direction each person will go when confronted with divine revelation.
10. The major issues facing Christians living in the devil's world. We'll look at the major areas where Satan is attacking God's people as well as His divine institutions.
11. The role of Christians in society. We'll discuss how Christians should live and respond to the major issues of our day.
12. An optimistic view of the present and future world. Here, we'll consider what Scripture says about the present and future, which gives us hope for where history is going. Scripture reveals there is a future hope for those who trust Christ as Savior and look forward to His return in which He suppresses all sinful rebellion and establishes His reign on the earth. This will be a time of righteousness and goodness for all those under Christ's rule.

Making Sense of the World – Part 1

The Bible as God’s Revelation to People

The Bible is intended to be a revelation of the being, works, and program of God. That an infinite God would seek to reveal Himself to His creatures is reasonable and is essential to God’s fulfilling His purpose in creation. It is only natural that rational beings should attempt to learn something about the Creator who made them.¹

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek word βίβλος *biblos* which means scroll or book. The Bible is a library of sixty-six books, composed by approximately forty human authors spanning nearly fifteen hundred years. “The purpose of God in providing the Bible is that man, to whom the Bible is addressed, may be possessed of dependable information regarding things tangible and intangible, temporal and eternal, visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly.”²

God has provided **general revelation** about Himself through nature (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:18-20), and **special revelation** directly (Ex 19:9; 1 Sam 3:1-14; Isa 6:9-10). God’s special revelation came through dreams (Gen 28:12; 31:11; Dan 7:1; 12:8-9), visions (Isa 6:1; 1 Ki 22:19), angels (Dan 10:10-21), Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14, 18; Heb 1:1-3; cf. Acts 10:9-16; 27:21-26), and the written Word (Psa 119:160; John 17:17; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul equated the writings of Moses and Luke as Scripture (1 Tim 5:18), as Peter did the writings of Paul (2 Pet 3:15-16). There are some Christians today who believe God continues to reveal Himself through all these avenues (i.e. Henry Blackaby, Rick Warren). However, other evangelical Christians believe God reveals Himself today only through nature, the Bible, and providentially through circumstances (the latter being discernable only by the Christian mind saturated with Scripture). Concerning faith and practice (orthodoxy & orthopraxy), the Bible alone guides the Christian. “He is a Biblicist, namely, one who not only regards the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice, but as the only dependable source of information in realms wherein divine revelation speaks.”³

Scripture reveals there is one God who exists as three distinct Persons within the Trinity (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2): God the Father (Gal 1:1; Eph 6:23; Phil 2:11), God the Son (John 1:1, 14, 18; 8:58; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 2:11-12; 2 Cor 13:14). All three are co-equal, co-infinite, co-eternal, and worthy of all praise and service. The Bible also reveals the origins of the universe (Gen

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer; John F. Walvoord; *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 30-31.

²Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich. Kregel Publication, 1993), 105.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

1:1), mankind (Gen 1:26-27), marriage (Gen 2:18-24), sin (Gen 3:1-8), moral absolutes (Ex 20:1-17), Israel (Isa 43:1), salvation through Jesus (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9), the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 10:32), the existence of Satan (Job 1:6-12), angels and demons (Heb 1:13-14; Rev 16:14), heaven and hell (Rev 4:1-2; 20:14-15), and the future (Rev 21-22). The Bible does not reveal all there is to know about God or His plans and actions, but only what He deems important (Deut 29:29; cf. John 21:25).

Though the Bible was written by fallible men, each was superintended by God the Holy Spirit, Who guided them in such a way that what they wrote, without compromising their personal choices of words and literary style, penned God's inerrant Word (verbal plenary inspiration). There is a parallel between the written Word and the Living Word. Just as God took a sinful woman, Mary, and supernaturally produced a sinless and perfect Person, Jesus; so God took sinful men and used them to produce a perfect book that accurately reflects His thoughts and will for mankind. The human authors—without forfeiting their personal literary style—wrote under the direction and superintending care of God the Holy Spirit (Ex 17:14; 34:27; Isa 30:8; Jer 30:2; Luke 1:3; 1 Cor 14:37; Rev 1:11), so that what is written is the inerrant and infallible “word of God” (1 Thess 2:13; cf. Psa 12:6-7; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20). Some of the various literary styles include historical narrative, law, poetry, psalms, proverbs, parables, and symbolism. The Bible is a dual authorship.

By the term *Dual Authorship*, two facts are indicated, namely, that, on the divine side, the Scriptures are the Word of God in the sense that they originate with Him and are the expression of His mind alone; and, on the human side, certain men have been chosen of God for the high honor and responsibility of receiving God's Word and transcribing it into written form.⁴

Scriptural claims:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (Ex 17:14; cf. Ex 34:27; Isa 30:8-9; Jer 30:2)

Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus...For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT’; and, ‘LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE [Psa 69:25; 109:8].’ (Acts 1:16, 20)

⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, “Bibliology” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 94 (1937): 398-399.

And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, ²⁵who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS [PSA 2:1]? (Acts 4:24-25)

And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, ‘GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE [Isa 6:9]. (Acts 28:25-26)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. (1 Cor 14:37)

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thess 2:13)

All Scripture [γραφή graphe – all written Scripture] is inspired by God [θεόπνευστος theopneustos – lit. God breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture [γραφή graphe] is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved [φέρω phero – pulled along by another cf. Acts 27:15, 17] by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pet 1:20-21).

Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures [equating Paul’s writings with Scripture], to their own destruction. (2 Pet 3:15-16)

Making Sense of the World – Part 2

The Person and Attributes of God

Learning about God and His character helps us understand the fundamental nature of reality. Scripture reveals God is the absolute standard for what is right. Apart from God and His Word, we have no absolute standard for right and wrong and are left with arbitrary laws based on manufactured or borrowed values. Atheism is the predominate belief system that stands in opposition to God. Atheism is the belief there is no God. For the atheist, mankind is nothing more than a molecular accident in a material universe where everything is the product of matter, motion, time and chance. For the atheist, there is no rational reason for a person to exist and no given purpose for his life. His thoughts, feelings, morals and actions are simply electrochemical impulses that occur in the body and brain, and when a person dies, those impulses cease. Right and wrong as well as good and evil become arbitrary. Without God and Scripture to guide and give man purpose, man's uniqueness is lost in the universe, as he is ultimately of no greater value than what he paints on the canvass or studies under the microscope. Biblical thinkers know this to be true; because if there is no God and man is not unique (as the Bible teaches), then he is of no greater value than the tree, the rock, or the worm on a hook. If there is no God, then man is a zero. When he dies, his biological life is consumed by the material universe from which he came. Consider this view of death by the atheist John Updike:

Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death: a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you were drawn while the white faces above recede. You try to reach them but your arms are pinned. Shovels pour dirt in your face. There you will be forever, in an upright position, blind and silent, and in time no one will remember you, and you will never be called by any angel. As strata of rock shift, your fingers elongate, and your teeth are distended sideways in a great underground grimace indistinguishable from a strip of chalk. And the earth tumbles on, and the sun expires, an unaltering darkness reigns where once there were stars.⁵

Most who hold to atheism desire to operate independently of any authority outside of themselves, especially God's authority set forth in Scripture. These assign no serious thought of God to their discussions, plans, or projects, but seek to use His resources independently of His wishes. But these same persons become trapped in their own system when their individual sense of good and evil, right and wrong, clashes with another person who holds to opposing moral standards. Having rejected God and moral absolutes, they have no objective final standard by which to measure values and behavior, to declare anything good or bad. These can go about their daily affairs as long as the pressures of

⁵ John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers* (New York, NY, Random House Publishers, 1975), 17.

life are not too great; however, if they're ever confronted with vicious evil that disrupts their lives, they'll naturally seek a mechanism to control it, lest it destroy them (I'm speaking about the atheist who desires law and order rather than anarchy and chaos). If they continue to reject God, they'll likely turn to a totalitarian government they hope is strong enough to deal with the depravity of reckless people; but in so doing, they'll trade freedom and prosperity for slavery and the illusion of equality. A society that acknowledges God and operates in accordance with His moral laws will tend to produce a virtuous people that can enjoy freedom and prosperity; but this must start with God.

God Exists as Trinity

Scripture opens with the statement, "In the beginning God" (Gen 1:1a). The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God, but simply acknowledges His being. Those who are positive to divine truth accept this statement. Furthermore, the Bible reveals God exists as a Trinity (or Triunity). In the Bible we learn that there is one God (Deut 6:4), who exists as three Persons (Gen 1:26; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2). All three members of the Godhead are co-equal, co-infinite, and co-eternal, possessing the same nature and attributes (Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6-8; John 10:30; 14:9).⁶ The Trinity consists of **God the Father** (Gal 1:1; Eph 6:23; Phil 2:11), **God the Son** (Isa 7:14; 9:6; John 1:1, 8:58; 20:28; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8), and **God the Holy Spirit** (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 2:11-12; 2 Cor 13:14). The Bible reveals God has specific attributes that describe who He is and explain why He thinks and acts in certain ways. What we know of God's attributes comes to us only by divine revelation, and these attributes belong to all the members of the Trinity, who are worthy of all praise and service.

The various perfections of God are not component parts of God. Each describes His total being. Love, for example, is not a part of God's nature; God in His total being is love. Although God may display one quality or another at a given time, no quality is independent of or preeminent over any of the others. Whenever God displays His wrath, He is still love. When He shows His love, He does not abandon His holiness. God is more than the sum total of His perfections. When we have listed all the attributes we can glean from revelation, we have not fully described God. This stems from His incomprehensibility. Even if we could say we had a complete list of all God's perfections, we could not fathom their meaning, for finite man cannot comprehend the infinite God.⁷

⁶ The use of the Hebrew numeral אחד *echad* reveals, in some contexts, the idea of a *complex one* (cf. Gen 2:24; Ezra 3:1; Ezek 37:17).

⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 39–40.

When studying the attributes of God, the student of Scripture should never seek to understand them separately from God, as though an attribute of God may exist apart from Him. More so, the attributes of God are as infinite as God Himself, and to try to understand them fully is not within the scope of our ability. A detailed understanding of God's attributes prevents the believer from developing an incomplete or faulty view of God, in which he/she sees Him only in part. For example, a solitary view of God as righteous can lead a Christian to legalistic behavior, whereas a singular understanding of God as loving or gracious can lead to licentiousness. A thorough biblical understanding of God will prove healthy for the Christian who seeks to reflect His character. The biblical revelation of God has practical application for the growing Christian, for as the believer advances in spiritual maturity, he/she will take on the characteristics of God, though only a few of those characteristics may be visible to others at any given moment, depending on the situation. The major attributes of God as revealed in Scripture are as follows:

1. **Living** – God is living and is the source of all life. He is personal, thoughtful, emotive, volitional and active. “My soul thirsts for God, for **the living God**” (Psa 42:2a). “My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to **the living God**” (Psa 84:2). “But the LORD is the true God; He is **the living God** and the everlasting King” (Jer 10:10a). “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of **the living God.**’” (Matt 16:16).
2. **Self-Existent (aseity)** – God's existence depends on nothing outside of Himself. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’” (Exo 3:14a). John writes “**In Him was life**” (John 1:4), and He “**has life in Himself**” (John 5:26).
3. **Holy** – God is positively righteous and separate from all that is sinful. “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, **for I am holy**” (Lev 11:44a). “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for **holy is the LORD our God**” (Psa 99:9).
4. **Spirit** – The nature of God's being is spirit, not material. “**God is spirit**, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for **a spirit does not have flesh and bones** as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).
5. **Sovereign** – God acts freely as He pleases, always as He pleases, and only as He pleases. “But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases**” (Psa 115:3). “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but **He does according to His will** in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35; cf. Isa 46:9-11; Acts 17:24-28).
6. **Immutable** – God's essential nature does not change. “Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But **You are the same**, and Your years will

- not come to an end.” (Psa 102:26-27). “For **I, the LORD, do not change**; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” (Mal 3:6).
7. **Eternal** – God has always existed, does exist, and forever will exist. “**The eternal God** is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut 33:27). “Now to **the King eternal**, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Tim 1:17).
 8. **Infinite** – God exists in space, but is also beyond space, infinite in being. ““But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and **the highest heaven cannot contain You**, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Ki 8:27). “Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him? declares the LORD. **Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?** declares the LORD” (Jer 23:24).
 9. **All-knowing** – God knows all things, being infinite in knowledge. “O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, **You know it all**” (Psa 139:1-4). “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for **your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things**. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:31-33)
 10. **All-present** – God is equally and fully everywhere present. “**Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?** If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.” (Psa 139:7-10). ““Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?” declares the LORD. ‘**Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?**’ declares the LORD.” (Jer 23:24)
 11. **All-powerful** – God is able to accomplish all He desires. “Then Job answered the LORD and said, ‘**I know that You can do all things**, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted’” (Job 42:2). “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth **does not become weary or tired**. His understanding is inscrutable.” (Isa 40:28).
 12. **Righteous** – God’s righteousness is that intrinsic moral perfection, from which He commands all things in heaven and earth, and declares as good that which conforms to His righteousness and as evil that which deviates. “For **the LORD is righteous**, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face” (Psa 11:7). “**Righteous are You, O LORD**, and upright are Your judgments” (Psa 119:137).
 13. **Just** – God’s justice is the outworking of His righteousness in which He justifies or condemns, blesses or curses, that which does or does not conform to His character. “The LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, and **He will judge the world in righteousness**; He will execute judgment for the

- peoples with equity” (Psa 9:7-8). “**The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether**” (Psa 19:9b).
14. **True** – God is genuine, in contrast to false idols. “**But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King**” (Jer 10:10a). “This is eternal life, that they may know You, **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (Joh 17:3).
15. **Truthful** – God is truthful. His knowledge and declarations define reality and help us make sense of what is. “Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and **Your words are truth**, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant” (2 Sam 7:28). “Sanctify them in the truth; **Your word is truth**” (Joh 17:17).
16. **Loving** – God desires our best, and He gives for our benefit. “The LORD appeared to him [Israel] from afar, *saying*, ‘**I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness**’” (Jer 31:3). “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, **for God is love**” (1 John 4:7-8).
17. **Good** – *The Lord is good and He is the ultimate source of all that is good.* “**The LORD is good to all**, and His mercies are over all His works” (Psa 145:9). “**The LORD is good**, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him” (Nah 1:7). “**For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations**” (Psa 100:5). “**Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above**, coming down from the Father of lights” (Jam 1:17).
18. **Faithful** – God is reliable in all He says and does, always keeping His word. “Know therefore that the LORD your God, **He is God, the faithful God**, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut 7:9). “This I recall to my mind; therefore, I have hope. The LORD’S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. *They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*” (Lam 3:21-23).
19. **Merciful** – *God is compassionate and kind toward others.* “You, O Lord, are a **God merciful** and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth” (Psa 86:15). “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to **His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5).
20. **Gracious** – God treats us better than we deserve. “He has made His wonders to be remembered; **the LORD is gracious** and compassionate” (Psa 111:4). “**Gracious is the LORD**, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate.” (Psa 116:5).

Making Sense of the World – Part 3

The Sovereignty of God

The Bible reveals “The LORD is King forever and ever” (Psa 10:16a), and “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all” (Psa 103:19). God is supreme over all His creation, for “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psa 135:6). And “He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). But God is no tyrant; rather, He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin” (Exo 34:6-7a). Only the humble will benefit from God’s goodness, for “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5). In contrast, God judges the wicked, and “will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Exo 34:7b).⁸ For “those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity” (Psa 125:5). From Genesis to Revelation, God governs the lives of people and nations. Human rulers exist because of His plan, for “It is He who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding” (Dan 2:21). And people live and die as God decides, for “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam 2:6; cf. Acts 17:28). He controls when and where people live in history, for “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). God has power over wealth and poverty, for “The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts” (1 Sam 2:7). Lastly, God allows fallen angels and humans to produce sin and evil, but they never act beyond or against His sovereign will (Job 1:1-21; Psa 105:12-15; 1 Ki 22:19-23; 2 Cor 12:7-10). God’s sovereignty over all creation is a prevailing theme throughout Scripture.

God gives freedom to his creatures, both angelic and human, and this to varying degrees. We are free to act, but only within the spheres of power and opportunity He creates and controls. For example, when facing judgment, Pilate told Jesus, “I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You” (John 19:10). But Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

⁸ The judgment that God brings upon “the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” refers to those generations who follow in the path of their parents, who hate God and continue the pattern of sin handed down to them.

God is under no external restraint whatsoever. He is the Supreme Dispenser of all events. All forms of existence are within the scope of His dominion. And yet this is not to be viewed in any such way as to abridge the reality of the moral freedom of God's responsible creatures or to make men anything else than the arbiters of their own eternal destinies. God has seen fit to create beings with the power of choice between good and evil. He rules over them in justice and wisdom and grace.⁹

God never creates evil; however, He can and does control those who do. Satan, and those who follow him (both fallen angels and people), are ultimately under God's sovereign control, and even their evil plans and actions are used for His good purposes. For example, Joseph was mistreated by his brothers and sold into slavery and taken to Egypt where he suffered greatly. Yet, later in his life, Joseph interpreted their behavior from the divine perspective, telling his brothers, "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:5, 7-8a). And later, he told them a second time, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:20). And Peter, charging Israelites in Jerusalem concerning Jesus's crucifixion, said, "This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23). And after being persecuted by the leaders in Jerusalem, Peter and John, along with others, said, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur" (Acts 4:27-28). In these verses we see the sovereignty of God working "all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11), who "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). This knowledge benefits those who are positive to God and operate from the divine perspective.

⁹ E. McChesney, "Sovereignty of God," ed. Merrill F. Unger and R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

Making Sense of the World - Part 4 **Holy Angels and How They Influence Mankind**

The purpose of this lesson is to understand what the Scriptures state about the reality of angels and to consider how they impact the world in which we live. Angels are basically classified as either *righteous* or *evil*. The former retain their holy state and service to God and are called *elect angels* (1 Tim 5:21), whereas the latter have defected from their original state and continue in constant rebellion against God. The existence and impact of angels is real, influencing individuals and groups in matters pertaining to social, political and moral life. Holy angels continue to serve God and advance His agenda for human history.

Thirty-four books of the Bible teach the existence of angels. The word *angel* occurs approximately 275 times throughout Scripture. The word *angel* translates the Hebrew word מַלְאָכִים *malak* and the Greek word ἄγγελος *aggelos*, and both words mean *messenger*. Angels are created beings (Psa 148:2-5; Col 1:16), were present at the creation of the world (Job 38:4-7), have volition (Matt 8:28-32), emotion (Mark 1:23-26), and intelligence (1 Pet 1:12). Angels are spirit beings who help advance the gospel (Heb 1:14), are distinct from humans (Luke 8:27), have great power (Psa 103:20-21; 2 Pet 2:11), are innumerable (Heb 12:22; Rev 5:11), cannot die (Luke 20:36), and do not reproduce after their kind (Mark 12:25), which means there are no baby angels. As creatures, angels are not to be worshipped (Col 2:18; Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). Seraphim—angels with six wings—are devoted to the worship of God (Isa 6:1-3), and Cherubim—angels with four wings—are devoted to protecting the Lord’s holiness (Ezek 28:14).

As spirit beings, angels function in an invisible realm and were only observable to people when God chose to reveal them (in theology, this is called an angelophany). For example, Elisha’s servant saw the angelic chariots of fire only when God opened his eyes (2 Ki 6:15-17), and John was permitted to see myriads of angels around God’s throne (Rev 5:11). The vast majority of us are never given the opportunity of direct observation, but rather, we learn about angels through the revelation of God’s Word.

God used holy angels to minister to His people. For example, angels were instrumental in protecting Lot and his family before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-25). When Israel was in Egyptian captivity, God judged Egypt by means of “a band of destroying angels” (Psa 78:49), who were apparently involved in administering the plagues (Psa 78:43-49). When Israel was fleeing Egypt and being pursued by Pharaoh and his army, God sent His angel to protect them (Exo 14:19-20; Num 20:16). When Elijah was fearful, depressed, and running for his life, God sent an angel to provide for him and encourage him until he came to the end of his journey (1 Ki 19:1-8). When a powerful Assyrian army came against Jerusalem to destroy it, (2 Chron 32:1-19), King

Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet “prayed about this and cried out to heaven” (2 Chron 32:20), and the Lord rescued them by sending “an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria” (2 Chron 32:21). When three of God’s servants refused to submit to the tyranny of the king of Babylon and were thrown alive into a furnace of fire, God honored their faith and “sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him” (Dan 3:28). Later, when Daniel was persecuted and thrown into a den of lions for not following a foolish edict, God protected His servant and “sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths” (Dan 6:22). God also used an angel named Gabriel, who told Daniel, “In the first year of Darius the Mede, I [Gabriel] arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him” (Dan 11:1). It was Gabriel who announced the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, telling Mary, she had “found favor with God” and informing her, “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:30-33). Later, when the baby Jesus was facing danger, “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream” and instructed him, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him” (Matt 2:13). And afterward, “when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ‘Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead’” (Matt 2:19-20). After Jesus experienced fatiguing temptations from Satan, it is written that “angels came and ministered to Him” (Matt 4:11). After Jesus’ resurrection, “an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it” (Matt 28:2). When some of the apostles had been arrested and thrown into prison, we are informed that “during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison and released them to continue preaching” (Acts 5:19). And when Peter had been arrested by King Herod, the church prayed for him, and God “sent forth His angel and rescued” Peter from certain death (Act 12:11).

The book of Revelation reveals angels are instrumental in executing God’s judgments upon the earth (Rev 7:1-2; 8:1-3; 5, 8, 10, 12; 9:1, 13-14; 10:1, 5, 7-9; 15:1, 6-8; 16:1; 21:9). About half way through the Tribulation, there will be “war in heaven, [with] Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon...and his angels” (Rev 12:7), and Satan and his angels will be thrown out of heaven by force (Rev 12:9). And after the Tribulation “the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will repay every man according to his deeds” (Matt 16:27). Furthermore, God’s “angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them [the wicked] into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:49-50).

Though we don't see holy angels, by faith in God's Word we know they are present and active in our lives to help protect, provide, and strengthen us as we walk with the Lord. We also know they are active in the affairs of everyday life, helping to advance God's purposes in a fallen world.

Making Sense of the World - Part 5 **Demons and How They Influence Mankind**

Angels are basically classified as either *righteous* or *evil*. The former retain their holy state and service to God and are called *elect angels* (1 Tim 5:21), whereas the latter have defected from their original state and continue in constant rebellion against God. Satan is the leader of all fallen angels (Matt 25:41; cf. Rev 12:7, 9), which Scripture designates as *evil spirits* (1 Sam 16:14; Luke 7:21), *demons* (Matt 8:31), and *unclean spirits* (Mark 5:1-4). These have been operating for millennia trying to frustrate the purposes of God.

All angels, whether good or bad, are organized for service and effectiveness. Michael is called an *archangel* (Jude 1:9), a *chief prince* (Dan 10:13), and is assigned the task of guarding Israel (Dan 12:1). Gabriel is a messenger angel who was sent to deliver important messages to God's people (Dan 8:16; 9:21-22; Luke 1:19; 26-38). Both Michael and Gabriel are recorded in Scripture as battling fallen angels who appear as commanders of regions of the world (Dan 10:12-13, 21). One fallen angel is called "the prince of Persia" and the other "the prince of Greece" (Dan 10:20). These no doubt function as Satan's emissaries to promote his purposes, and are part of a larger group that Paul called *the forces of darkness* (Eph 6:12). Demons can possess the bodies of men (Luke 11:24-26), animals (Gen 3:1-5; Mark 5:11-13; 2 Cor 11:3), and sometimes cause physical and mental illness (Matt 9:32-33; Luke 8:27).

Demons have some freedom, but not beyond the boundaries God has established (Job 1:1-21). God sometimes uses fallen angels to accomplish His sovereign purposes (1 Sam 16:14-16; 2 Cor 12:7-10), just as He sometimes uses sinful people to bring about His will (Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28). The final destiny of Satan and demons will be the Lake of Fire, which God created as a special place of punishment for them (Matt 25:41). Those who reject Christ as Savior will join Satan in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:11-15). Those who accept Jesus as Savior are forgiven all their sins (Eph 1:7; Heb 10:10-14), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28), and will spend forever in heaven (John 14:1-3).

Fallen angels are involved in the affairs of mankind. The person who operates by negative volition aligns himself with Satan and his forces. Negative volition leads to idolatry, and idolatry leads to immorality (Rom 1:18-32), both individually and nationally. The worship of idols is the worship of demons (Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:19-21). Demons generally led the pagan nations into idolatry, which God's people were not to practice (Deut 18:9-14). However, when God's people mingled with them, they learned their idolatrous practices (1 Ki 11:1-8), and even created their own idols (1 Ki 12:26-33), which eventuated in human sacrifice (2 Ki 17:7-23; Psa 106:35-38; cf. 2 Ki 16:1-4; 21:1-9; Jer 32:30-35; Ezek 16:20-21; 20:31; 23:37).

When rulers turned away from God, He would use evil spirits to discipline them (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14-15). This resulted in the disciplined person experiencing mental madness and murderous behavior (1 Sam 18:10-12; cf. 1 Sam 19:9-10). God used an evil spirit to bring about the military defeat and death of King Ahab (2 Chron 18:18-22).

Some angels who were once free, are now kept in “eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” and appear to have forfeited their freedom altogether due to some unnamed sinful violation (Jude 1:6), perhaps the account described in Genesis 6:1-5. And some very destructive angels (described as metal-like locusts) are now kept in the Abyss—a temporary spiritual prison—and will be released and led by a powerful angel whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon (Rev 9:1-12). Four unnamed, but very dangerous angels, are said to be bound under the River Euphrates (Rev 9:13-16). These four angels will kill one third of mankind during the Great Tribulation. Other evil spirits will be used to gather world rulers and their armies together for the Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:13-14; cf. Rev 19:11-21).

As Christians, we face social, political and religious attacks in our day, and there are dark spiritual forces at work driving much of what we see. Scripture is very clear when it says, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). These demonic forces are behind every act of terror the world has ever known, and their activity is tireless. Thankfully, God has given us armor and a weapon to protect us, which also serve to aid in the rescue and defense of others who face spiritual attacks. This is described in Ephesians 6:13-18.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day [i.e. the day in which evil forces attack], and having done everything [in preparation], to stand firm [in a prepared state]. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth [i.e. living truthfully according to the truth of God’s Word], and having put on the breastplate of righteousness [i.e. living righteously as one who has received imputed righteousness], and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace [i.e. sharing the gospel that brings peace with God; cf. Rom 5:1-2]; in addition to all [i.e. all the armor previously mentioned], taking up the shield of faith [i.e. the shield which is faith] with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation [i.e. the confidence of present and future salvation; cf. John 10:28; 1 Thess 5:8-9], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God [the spoken word of Scripture we use to fight back; see Matt 4:4, 7, 10]. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit [i.e. in the power of the Spirit], and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints [praying for God’s people, who are also under spiritual attack]” (Eph 6:13-18).

Making Sense of the World - Part 6

Satan as the Ruler of this World

The purpose of this lesson is to show that Satan has a certain amount of control over this world and relies on numerous fallen angels and sinful people to help him accomplish his agenda. This knowledge will help us make sense of the current state of policies and practices we see and experience.

The Bible reveals Satan was originally created a holy angel of the class of cherubim; however, because of pride (Ezek 28:11-18), he rebelled against God (Isa 14:12-14), and convinced many angels to follow him (Rev 12:4, 7). The name Satan is derived from the Hebrew שָׂטָן *Satan* which means “adversary, opponent...accuser, opposing party...[or] the one who hinders a purpose”¹⁰ The Greek Σατανᾶς *Satanas* carries the same meaning and is used “in a very special sense of the enemy of God and all of those who belong to God.”¹¹ Other names for Satan include the *shining one*, or *Lucifer* (Isa 14:12), the *evil one* (1 John 5:19), the *tempter* (1 Thess 3:5), the *devil* (Matt 4:1), the *god of this world* (2 Cor 4:4), the *accuser of the brethren* (Rev 12:10), the *prince of the power of the air* (Eph 2:2), the *serpent* (Rev 12:9), and the *great red dragon* (Rev 12:3). Further, Satan is a *murderer* and *liar* (John 8:44), is compared to a *lion* that prowls about, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), and one who disguises himself as an *angel of light* (2 Cor 11:14).

Lucifer became Satan at the time of his rebellion when he declared, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isa 14:13-14). “The desire of Satan was to move in and occupy the throne of God, exercise absolute independent authority over the angelic creation, bring the earth and all the universe under his authority, cover himself with the glory that belongs to God alone, and then be responsible to no one but himself.”¹² Satan seeks to operate independently of God’s plan for him, and he leads others, both saved and unsaved, to do the same. Lucifer introduced sin and death to the first humans when he convinced them to turn from God and eat the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-7). At the time of the fall, Adam handed his kingdom over to Satan, who has been ruling this world since (Luke 4:5-6; Rev 11:15).

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1317.

¹¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 916.

¹² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing, 1969), 25-26.

Satan is permitted, for a time, to rule over the majority in this world. At the time when Jesus began His public ministry, He faced a series of tests from Satan, one of which was an offer to receive the kingdoms of the world without going to the cross. Satan told Jesus, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). Satan took possession of “this domain and its glory” by God’s permission and man’s sin, presumably, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and follow Satan (Gen 3:1-8). Satan said to Jesus, “Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours” (Luke 4:7). Satan’s offer had to be true in order for the temptation to be real. At some time in the future, Satan will share his authority with the Antichrist, because he advances his agenda (Rev 13:1-2). Three times Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call Satan “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), informing us “that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan rules as a tyrant who has “weakened the nations” (Isa 14:12), and currently “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9). He personally attacked Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7), Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-13), David, (1 Chr 21:1), Joshua the high priest (Zec 3:1-2), Jesus (Matt 4:1-11), Judas (John 13:27), and Peter (Luke 22:31-32). He continues to attack God’s people today (1 Pet 5:8), practices deception (2 Cor 11:13-15), and has well developed strategies of warfare (Eph 6:10-12). Furthermore, humanity is living in an “evil age” (Gal 1:4), under “the dominion of Satan” (Acts 26:18), whose sphere of influence is called “the domain of darkness” (Col 1:13).

As Christians, we have victory in Christ. At the moment we trusted Christ as Savior, God “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). As Christians, we have been gifted with God’s own righteousness (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and will never face condemnation (Rom 8:1). Furthermore, God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3), and called us to serve as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20), sharing the gospel message with others.

God the Father has promised to give Jesus the kingdoms of this world, saying, “I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession” (Psa 2:8; cf. Isa 2:1-5; Dan 2:44; 7:14). This will occur after the seven-year Tribulation; at which time it will be said, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15; cf. 20:1-3). Satan was judged at the cross (John 12:31; 16:11; Col 2:14-15), and awaits future punishment. His judgment is very near when he is cast out of heaven during the Tribulation (Rev 12:7-12); at which time his wrath is greatest against Israel. After the return of Christ (Rev 19:11-16) and the establishment of His kingdom (Rev 20:1-6), Satan will be confined to the abyss for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3). Afterwards, he is released for a brief time and will again deceive the nations and lead a rebellion against God (Rev

20:7-8), but will be quickly defeated (Rev 20:9), and cast into the Lake of Fire, where he will remain, with his demons and all unbelievers forever (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10-15).

Making Sense of the World - Part 7

Satan's World System

The purpose of this lesson is to reveal what the Bible says about Satan's world-system, by which he influences those who reside in, or participate in his kingdom of darkness.

The Bible recognizes Satan's world-system and warns us not to love it (1 John 2:15-16). When John writes and tells the Christian "do not love the world", he's not talking about the physical planet. The Greek word κόσμος *kosmos* as it is used by the apostle John and others most often refers to "that which is hostile to God...lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved."¹³ Satan's world-system consists of those philosophies and values that perpetually influence humanity to think and behave contrary to God and His Word. This operating apart from God is first and foremost a way of thinking that is antithetical to God and His Word, a way of thinking motivated by a desire to be free from God and the authority of Scripture, a freedom most will accept, even though it is accompanied by all sorts of inconsistencies and absurdities.

The *kosmos* is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God—a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share; who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects, nor do they ascribe any causality to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies; its education, culture, religions of morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live on this earth. It is properly styled "*The Satanic System*" which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so-meaningful word, *kosmos*.¹⁴

People who live in Satan's world-system exclude God and Scripture from their daily conversations. This is true in news, politics, academic communities, work and home life. God is nowhere in their thoughts, and therefore, nowhere in their discussions (Psa 10:4; 14:1). The growing Christian thinks about God and His Word all the time, as "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psa 1:2). The contrast between the growing Christian and the worldly person is stark, as their thoughts and words take them in completely different directions.

At the core of Satan's world-system is a directive for mankind to function apart from God, and when obeyed, people produce all forms of evil, both moral and immoral. We should

¹³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 562.

¹⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, "Angelology Part 4" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99 (1942): 282-283.

understand that Satan’s system is a buffet that offers something for everyone who rejects God, whether that person is moral or immoral, religious or irreligious, educated or simple, rich or poor. Satan is careful to make sure there’s even something for the Christian in his world-system, which is why the Bible repeatedly warns the believer not to love the world or the things in the world. We are to be set apart (Col 2:8; Jam 1:27; 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16). “The world is the Christian’s enemy because it represents an anti-God system, a philosophy that is diametrically opposed to the will and plan of God. It is a system headed by the devil and therefore at odds with God (2 Cor 4:4)...It is in this wicked world we must rear our families and earn our livelihoods. We are in it, yet are not to be a part of it.”¹⁵ It is important to understand that we cannot change Satan or his evil program; however, we must be on guard, for it can and will change us if we’re not careful to learn and live God’s Word.

At the moment of salvation, God the Father “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13), and “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). This transference is permanent and cannot be undone. Once this happens, we are hated by those who remain in Satan’s kingdom of darkness. For this reason, Jesus said to His disciples, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:18-19; cf. John 16:33; 1 John 3:13). *Love* and *hate* in this context should be understood as *accept* or *reject*, which can be mild or severe in expression. When praying to the Father, Jesus said, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14b), and went on to say, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). It is not God’s will that we be immediately removed from this world at the moment of salvation, but left here to serve as His representatives to the lost, that we “may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). We are not to participate in worldly affairs that exclude God, but are to “walk as children of Light” (Eph 5:8), manifesting the fruit of the Light “in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph 5:9-10), and we are told, “do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Eph 5:11).

The growing Christian faces real struggles as Satan’s world system seeks to press him into its mold, demanding conformity, and persecuting him when he does not bend to its values. The world-system not only has human support, but is backed by demonic forces that operate in collaboration with Satan. Scripture tells us “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Eph 6:12).

¹⁵ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, p. 206.

The battlefield is more than what is seen with the human eye and is driven by unseen spiritual forces. As Christians living in the world we are to be careful not to be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col 2:8). Realizing the battleground is the mind, we are to think biblically in everything, which is our only safeguard against the enemy (2 Cor 10:3-5).

Christians face situations every day in which they are pressured to compromise God’s Word. They face difficulties at work, school, home, or other places, in which they are confronted by worldly-minded persons, both saved and unsaved, who demand and pressure them to abandon their biblical values. There is room for personal compromise where Scripture is silent on a matter; however, where Scripture speaks with absolute authority, there the believer must never compromise! “The world, or world-system, puts pressure on each person to try to get him to conform (Rom 12:2). Jesus Christ was not “of this world” and neither are His people (John 8:23; 17:14). But the unsaved person, either consciously or unconsciously, is controlled by the values and attitudes of this world.”¹⁶

By promoting the gospel and biblical teaching, the church disrupts Satan’s domain of darkness by calling out of it a people for God. By learning God’s Word, Christians can identify worldly conversations and activities and either avoid them or seek to redirect them by interjecting biblical truth, which should never be done in hostility. When sharing God’s Word with others it’s proper to know that not everyone wants to hear God’s truth, and even though we may not agree with them, their personal choices should be respected (Matt 11:14; Acts 13:50-51). We should never try to force the gospel or Bible teaching on anyone, but be willing to share when opportunity presents itself. At times this will bring peace, and other times cause disruption and may even offend. In this interaction, the growing Christian must be careful not to fall into the *exclusion trap*, in which the worldly person (whether saved or lost) controls the content of every conversation, demanding the Christian only talk about worldly issues, as Scripture threatens his pagan presuppositions. Having the biblical worldview, the Christian should insert himself into daily conversations with others, and in so doing, be a light in a dark place. He should always be respectful, conversational, and never have a fist-in-your-face attitude, as arrogance never helps advance biblical truth (2 Tim 2:24-26). The worldly-minded person may not want to hear what the Christian has to say, but he should never be under the false impression that he has the right to quiet the Christian and thereby exclude him from the conversation.

As we grow spiritually and walk with God, learning and living His Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17), we stand in opposition to Satan’s world-system and sow the seeds of spiritual

¹⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 18.

insurrection in the lives of those who live and walk in his kingdom of darkness. We disrupt Satan's kingdom when we share the gospel, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). When anyone places their faith in Christ, trusting solely in Him as Savior, they are forgiven all their sins (Eph 1:7), and gifted with eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28), and the righteousness of God (Rom 4:1-5; 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). They are rescued from Satan's enslaving power, as God rescues them from the "domain of darkness" and transfers them into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13). The gospel is the only thing that will deliver a person from spiritual slavery; "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). Once saved, we seek to influence the thoughts and lives of other Christians through fellowship (Heb 10:23-25), prayer (Jam 5:16), edification (Eph 4:29), encouragement (1 Thess 5:11), love (1 Thess 4:9; cf. Eph 4:14-15), and words of grace (Col 4:6).

Making Sense of the World – Part 8
The Historic Fall of Mankind

The purpose of this lesson is to reveal that mankind is fallen, corrupted by sin, and that our natural proclivity is to think and act in conformity with Satan’s world-system, which is everywhere and always at odds with God and His plan.

As we’ve already considered, sin and rebellion already existed in the angelic realm prior to the fall of Adam and Eve (Ezek 28:12-17; Isa 14:12-14). God created Adam to have responsible dominion over His creation (Gen 1:26-30; 2:7-8, 15-17), and Eve was created to help Adam, to stand with him to do God’s will (Gen 2:18-25). But Satan, possessing a serpent—a subordinate creature that would have posed little threat to Adam and Eve—tempted them to act contrary to God and His commands. “Demonic spirits evidently have the ability, under certain conditions, to indwell or ‘possess’ either human bodies or animal bodies (Luke 8:33); and Satan on this occasion chose the serpent as the one most suitable for his purposes.”¹⁷ The serpent here is identified as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9; cf. Rev 20:2).

Satan was shrewd and intentional in his attack as he approached the woman and questioned her understanding of God’s command, asking, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). And Eve answered, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” (Gen 3:2-3). In her reply, “Eve disparaged the privileges, added to the prohibition, and weakened the penalty—all seen by contrasting her words (Gen. 3:3) with God’s original commands (2:16-17).”¹⁸

Genesis 2:16-17	Genesis 3:2-3
The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely ; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”	The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat [freely] ; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden , God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it , or you will [surely] die.’”

¹⁷ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 108.

¹⁸ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 32.

When Satan heard Eve misrepresent God's instructions (Gen 2:16-17), he boldly advanced his argument, saying, "You surely will not die!" (Gen 3:4), calling God a liar, stating, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). Satan's argument was that God was withholding divinity from Adam and Eve, and if they were willing to eat the fruit, they could be like God, which was the same mental attitude sin committed by Lucifer at his fall (Isa 14:12-14). Here, Eve was confronted with an antithetical claim to what the Lord had told her, but rather than seek the Lord about the matter, she let Satan convince her to abandon faith in God and operate independently of Him. The influence of Satan brought an epistemological shift in Eve's thinking, and rather than seeing the tree from the divine perspective as harmful, she saw it as attractive, that is "was good for food...a delight to the eyes...[and] desirable to make one wise" (Gen 3:6a). Being deceived by Satan's argument, "she took from its fruit and ate" (Gen 3:6b; 1 Tim 2:14). Eve then "gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen 3:6c), and so Satan's strategy to advance his kingdom of darkness and take possession of the world and humanity was complete.

Sin and its judgment immediately after the fall:

1. **Adam and Eve sought to fix the sin-problem themselves.** Adam and Eve became aware of their failure, as "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (Gen 3:7). Remembering they were to "multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), Adam and Eve "realized that the very fountainhead of human life had now become corrupted by their disobedience and they became acutely aware of their nakedness. Their children would all be contaminated with the seed of rebellion, so that their feeling of guilt centered especially on their own procreative organs."¹⁹
2. **Heterodoxy and heteropraxy dominated their thinking and behavior.**²⁰ Spiritual death (i.e. separation from God) brought an irrational shift in their theology as well as their behavior as they sought to hide from the Lord (Gen 3:8-9), saying, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself" (Gen 3:10; cf. Jer 23:24).
3. **Adam and Eve blamed others for their failure.** When confronted about their sin (Gen 3:11), Adam blamed his wife as well as God, saying, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12), and Eve blamed the creature, saying, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen 3:13). Hiding from God and shifting blame for sin are common characteristics of mankind's fallenness.

¹⁹ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 115.

²⁰ Orthodoxy and orthopraxy refer to correct theology and living; whereas heterodoxy and heteropraxy refer to incorrect theology and faulty living.

4. **God pronounced judgment upon the serpent.** The serpent would be changed to crawl on its belly as a perpetual reminder to mankind about the fall (Gen 3:14). Here, the curse was actually against Satan, who possessed the serpent, as the Lord declared, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen 3:15). Having brought Adam and Eve under his control, it is possible Satan thought he would gain total control over all their children, but the Lord had other plans and made it known to Satan there would be “enmity” between him and the woman, as well as his “seed and her seed; [and] he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” This verse is commonly referred to as the protoevangelium—the first gospel—because God promises there would come a “seed” from the woman’s line who would defeat Satan and disrupt his kingdom.²¹
5. **God pronounced judgment upon Adam, Eve and the creation.** Eve’s judgment was that she would have increased “pain in childbirth” and that her husband would “rule over her” (Gen 3:16), and the ground that Adam was to cultivate would be cursed, and “in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen 3:17-19).

Lastly, we should understand the biblical view of people and the universe is under attack by atheists and liberal theologians who treat the book of Genesis—especially chapters 1-11—as myth. However, the NT writers treat Adam and Eve as historical persons and the fall as literal. Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:38), and Jesus based His argument on marriage on the first human couple (Matt 19:4-6). Paul also states, “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). And, “it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14). Paul argued that through Adam “sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12; cf. 1 Cor 15:21). And all humanity is said either to be *in Adam* or *in Christ*, and this determines whether we are alive or dead, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). Adam’s sin brought corruption and decay into the whole universe, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Rom 8:20-22). We now live in a very flawed world with sinful people and all sorts of problems.

²¹ Of course, we know this to be Jesus, the Messiah (Luke 1:26-33), and His victory occurred at the cross, where “the ruler of this world has been judged” and defeated (John 16:11; cf. Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Satan and his angels will eventually be cast into the Lake of Fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

Things are *not* “very good” in the world now! In the physical realm, everything tends to run down and wear out. In the living world, each animal is engaged in a perpetual struggle against other animals and against disease, as well as the universal process of aging and death. Culturally, one civilization after another seems to rise for a time, then decline and die. In the spiritual and moral realm, each individual invariably finds it easier to do wrong than right, easier to drift downward than to struggle upward. The world is full of hatred, crime, war, pollution, selfishness, corruption—evil of all kinds. Something has gone wrong with God’s perfect creation.²²

²² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 105.

Making Sense of the World – Part 9 The Effects of Sin

This present article is intended to show how the historic fall of Adam and Eve fundamentally changed the human race and the world, resulting in disease, decay and death among all living things, and that the tendency of humanity is to behave in a spiritually and morally corrupt manner, suppressing God's truth and rejecting His solutions to life's problems. Understanding this helps us make sense of the world in which we live and why people behave the way they do.

Sin is a dominant theme from Genesis chapter three to the end of the Bible, at which time God will do away with sin and its effects, creating a “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13; cf. Rev 21:1). The word *sin* is found throughout Scripture, and both the Hebrew and Greek share the same basic meaning. The Hebrew word חָטָא *chata* means “to miss the target, or to lose the way,”²³ and the Greek ἁμαρτάνω *hamartano* is defined as “miss the mark, err, or do wrong.”²⁴ Sin is when we transgress God's law and depart from His intended path.²⁵ The apostle John states, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and **sin is lawlessness**” (1 John 3:4). “The underlying idea of sin is that of law and of a lawgiver. The lawgiver is God. Hence sin is everything in the disposition and purpose and conduct of God's moral creatures that is contrary to the expressed will of God (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7; Jam 4:12, 17).”²⁶

Sin impacts all things including family life, nature, economics, society, law, politics, science, education, etc. All sin and evil exist in connection with the willful creatures who manufacture it, and its effects can be short or long-lasting. Even the creation is cursed because of Adam's sin, as the Lord told him, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17), to which Paul added, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Rom 8:20-22). Sin negatively impacts everyone and everything, and no one was impacted or hurt more by sin than God. On several occasions we read, “The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Gen 6:6),

²³ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 305.

²⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49.

²⁵ In Judges 20:16 the Hebrew word is used of skilled soldiers who do not *miss their target*, and in Proverbs 19:2 of a man who hurries and *misses his way*.

²⁶ Merrill F. Unger and E. McChesney, “Sin,” ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1198.

and though God loved Israel, their ongoing sin “grieved His Holy Spirit” (Isa 63:10). As Christians, we are commanded, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). Sin ultimately cost God His Son, who came into the world and died on a cross in order to atone for it (Mark 10:45; John 3:16; 10:14-18; Rom 8:32; 1 John 4:10), and to set us free from spiritual slavery (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:1; Heb 2:14-15).

The Bible reveals we are sinners *in Adam*, sinners *by nature*, and sinners *by choice*. To be a sinner *in Adam* means we sinned when he sinned, that his fallen position is our fallen position, and his guilt is our guilt (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-24; Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22). This is commonly referred to as *original sin*. Since the fall of Adam, every person is born with a sin nature (except Jesus),²⁷ and it is this nature that internally motivates people to rebel against all legitimate forms of authority, both human and divine. More so, the sin nature is not eradicated from the believer during his time on earth, nor is it ever reformed, as though it can be made to love God. To be a sinner *by nature* means it’s our innate tendency to sin (Jer 17:9; Matt 7:11; Rom 7:18-21; Eph 2:1-3). To be a sinner *by choice* means we personally choose to act contrary to God and His revealed will (1 Ki 8:46; Prov 20:9; Ecc 7:20; Isa 53:6; Rom 3:10-12; 1 John 1:10). Cumulatively these reveal that we are *totally depraved*, which means sin permeates and corrupts every aspect of our being, including our mind, will, sensibilities and flesh. Though we may be moral to the best of our ability and others may applaud us for our good deeds, our best efforts are tainted by sin and have no saving merit before God (Isa 64:6; Rom 4:1-5; 5:6-10; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5).

One of the major areas sin impacts us is in the mind, which theologians refer to as the *noetic effects* of sin. This means sin impacts our ability to think rationally, especially about God, who has made Himself known through general revelation (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:18-20) and special revelation (1 Cor 14:37; 1 Tim 5:18; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17). The majority of people throughout history think evil thoughts and are consumed with themselves and their own agendas rather than God’s will. Of Noah’s generation it is said, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Later, Solomon declared, “the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives” (Eccl 9:3). And Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). And Jesus Himself spoke of the human condition, saying, “for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, [and] slanders” (Matt 15:19). One would think that when Jesus came into the world that mankind would rejoice in His light; however, Scripture provides a different picture, telling us, “This is the judgment, that the Light has

²⁷ According to Scripture, Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21), was “without sin” (Heb 4:15), and “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). His sinless life qualified Him as a perfect sacrifice to go to the cross and die as a substitute for others (Rom 5:6-10; Heb 10:1-14; 1 Pet 3:18).

come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19; cf. 1:4-5). When talking to religious Pharisees, Jesus declared, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word” (John 8:43). This is true of all unbelievers, for “the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). Even something as simple as the Gospel message is “foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18), in whose case “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3-4). The tendency of fallen people who operate on negative volition is to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18), and to operate by a worldly wisdom that is not “from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (Jam 3:15).

At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit indwells us and gives us a new nature that, for the first time in our lives, has the desire and capacity to obey God; however, the sin nature is not removed, and so we experience ongoing internal conflict between these opposing natures (Gal 5:17; Rom 7:14-23). As Christians, we are directed to “lay aside the old self...and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:22, 24). Since we have been “born again” and given new life (1 Pet 1:3, 23), the sin nature no longer has domineering power over us, and we can choose a life of righteousness (Rom 6:5-13). As we grow spiritually, we will be transformed from the inside out and gradually become more and more righteous as we walk with God. Sinless perfection will not be attained until we leave this world, by death or by Rapture, and are “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29), who will “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phi 3:21). Until then, we are commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom 13:14). We do this by choosing to live according to the Spirit’s guiding, and starving the monster that is our sin nature. To “make no provision for the flesh” means we stop exposing ourselves to the things of the world that excite the flesh and lead to sinful behavior. The positive action is to grow spiritually with biblical teaching (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), Christian fellowship (Heb 10:23-25), selfless living (Phil 2:3-4), prayer (1 Thess 5:17), worship (Heb 13:15), and doing good (Gal 6:10; Heb 13:16). It is only by spiritual growth and drawing closer to God that we learn to glorify the Lord and live in righteousness.

Making Sense of the World - Part 10

Positive and Negative Volition

The purpose of this lesson is to reveal that people operate either on positive or negative volition toward God. Those who are positive to God respond favorably in two ways: 1) believe God's gospel and trust Jesus as Savior, and 2) advance to spiritual maturity by learning and living God's Word. Those who are negative to God are: 1) hostile to God's gospel, and 2) orient their thinking and life to Satan's world-system.

Volition is the ability to act within a sphere of freedom and in accordance with one's desires. There are three categories of volition in existence: God's volition (Isa 46:8-11; cf. Gen 1:1-31), angelic volition (Psa 103:20), and human volition (Gen 1:26-28). God's volition is absolute, immutable, and always operates in concert with His divine attributes. And, according to His sovereignty, He created intelligent and moral beings—angels and people—with the ability to obey or resist His directive will. In fact, Lucifer and a third of the angels exercised their volition against God and caused a bifurcation in the angelic realm (Isa 14:12-14; Rev 12:7; cf. Matt 25:41). Two thirds of the angels exercised their volition to stay with God, and these continue as holy angels to do His will (Matt 16:27; 26:53; 1 Tim 5:21; Heb 1:14). As Scripture reveals, Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey God, and this brought sin and death into the creation (Gen 3:1-8; Rom 5:12; 8:20-22), with the result that every person is born with a sinful nature and proclivity to sin (Jer 17:9; Matt 7:11; Rom 7:18-21; Gal 5:16-17; Eph 2:1-3). However, God has dealt with the sin problem through the life, death, burial and resurrection of His Son, Jesus (John 3:16; 1 Cor 15:3-4), who paid our sin debt (Col 2:13-14), and liberates us who have trusted in Jesus as Savior (Rom 8:1-4), so that we might not be controlled by sin, but will pursue righteousness (Rom 6:5-13; 1 Pet 2:24).

The tendency of people who operate on negative volition is to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18), and to operate by a worldly wisdom that is not “from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (Jam 3:15). The vast majority of humanity will not choose a relationship with God nor a walk with Him (Matt 7:13-14).

When God's Word is dethroned from the mind of the believer, other forces will dominate for the worse. God's desire for the Christian is to develop his/her character so that righteousness, goodness, grace and love flow easily and with continuity of expression. If the character is good then the behavior will be good, for it follows that a person with an honest character will easily and consistently behave in an honest manner, and a person with a loving character will easily and consistently behave in a loving manner. But good character does not automatically occur in the life of the Christian, nor does it happen overnight; rather, it matures over a lifetime as we make many good choices to walk in step with God and let His good Word transform us from the inside out. But we should be

aware that it is possible to abuse our liberty and make bad choices with the result that we weaken the will and forfeit our freedoms (the addict knows this to be true). Not only that, but bad choices and abuses of freedom bring harm to others within our periphery; for this reason, Scripture states, “You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13).

Unbelievers who love their moral depravity will naturally stand against those who are children of God and who love righteousness. This is why Scripture states, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). Those who set their wills against God will not listen to the Christian who comes with His message; however, they will listen to their own. The apostle John tells us about those who walk in darkness, saying, “They are from the world; therefore, they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them” (1 John 4:5). That is, there are those who operate from presuppositions and values that are cosmocentric, which exclude or pervert serious consideration and discussion about God, refusing to give Him any say over their lives. When confronted with divine revelation, the person who is negative to God either denies His existence (Psa 14:1), or reduces Him to the status of a creature (Rom 1:22-25). And the person who is negative to God can be simultaneously immoral and religious (2 Tim 3:1-5).

There are four categories of positive and negative volition in Scripture.

1. Those who are positive to God and His gospel and advance to spiritual maturity by learning and living Scripture and staying the course until the end of their life (David & Paul – 1 Ki 15:5; 1 2 Tim 4:7-8). These are not sinless believers; but rather, those who handle their sin in a biblical manner.
2. Those who are positive to God and His gospel, but then turn negative, preferring to follow Satan’s world-system (Solomon – 1 Ki 11:1-10; 1 Tim 1:19-20; 6:10). Some of these will fail to have a positive public influence because of external pressure from a Satanic hostile environment (John 12:42-43; 19:38).
3. Those who are negative to God and His gospel, but are favorable to the Bible as a moral system by which they seek to live their lives (i.e., following the Ten Commandments; Luke 18:18-27).
4. Those who are negative to God and His gospel and who vigorously pursue Satan’s world-system and are hostile toward believers who are advancing toward spiritual maturity (John 8:47; Acts 7:51-58; 1 John 4:6).

Examples of negative volition include:

1. The antediluvian generation (Gen 6:5-13; 2 Pet 2:5)
2. The city of Sodom (Gen 13:13)
3. The first generation of Israelites after the Exodus (Num 32:10-13; Deut 1:35)

4. Israel during the Judges (Judg 17:6; 21:25)
5. Solomon when he turned away from God and worshipped idols (1 Ki 11:1-10)
6. Israel under the leadership of Jeroboam (1 Ki 12:26-33)
7. Israel under the leadership of Ahab (1 Ki 16:29-33)
8. Judah's pre-exilic leaders (Jer 25:3)
9. Jesus' generation who rejected Him (John 3:19; 12:37; cf. Matt 23:37-38)
10. The last generation of the church (2 Tim 3:1-5)
11. The last generation of the millennial kingdom (Rev 20:7-9).

Examples of positive volition include:

1. Enoch, who walked with God (Gen 5:21-24)
2. Noah, who obeyed the Lord (Gen 6:22)
3. Moses, who led Israel out of Egypt (Ex 3:1—14:31)
4. Joshua, who led Israel into the Promised Land (Josh 1:1-18)
5. The Ninevites who responded positively to Jonah's preaching (Jon 3:1-10)
6. Elijah, who turned Israel back to the Lord (1 Ki 18:17-40)
7. King Josiah, who delayed God's judgment against Judah (2 Ki 22:1-20)
8. The apostles (Matt 19:27-28)
9. Saul, who believed in Jesus and spread the gospel (Acts 9:1-20).

Conclusion:

Every person we meet is either positive or negative to God and His Word. Though we are not neutral and try to persuade people to believe the gospel (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Eph 2:8-9), and live righteously (Rom 6:11-14; Tit 2:11-14), each person must choose to accept or reject the offer. Those who believe in Jesus will be forgiven all their sins (Eph 1:7), given eternal life (John 10:28), and will spend forever in heaven (John 14:1-4); and believers who pursue righteousness will be rewarded in eternity (1 Cor 3:10-15). Those who reject the gospel have no other way to be saved and will forever be separated from God in the Lake of Fire (John 3:18; Rev 20:11-15).

Making Sense of the World - Part 11

Advancing Toward Spiritual Maturity

The purpose of this lesson is to help us realize we're not neutral nor helpless concerning the culture in which we live, and that right-living not only helps to curb divine judgment, but can also bring blessing to others. Our objective as Christians is to advance to spiritual maturity which glorifies God and blesses those around us.

The advance to spiritual maturity is a process that takes time as Christians learn and live God's Word on a regular basis. But this is not an easy process, for we live in the devil's world and are confronted with many obstacles and distractions that seek to push or pull us away from God. Though constant distractions are all around us, we are "destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Bringing our thoughts into captivity means focusing our minds on God and His Word (Isa 26:3; Pro 3:5-6; Col 3:1-2), and not allowing our thoughts to be bogged down and trapped with the cares of this world (Matt 6:25-34). This requires spiritual discipline to learn and live God's Word on a regular basis as we advance to spiritual maturity. Biblically, several things are necessary for us to reach spiritual maturity, and these are as follows:

1. **Be in submission to God.** Scripture tells us to "Submit to God" (Jam 4:7), and "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom 12:1). Being in submission to God means we desire the Lord's will above all else. When this happens, God's Word opens up to us (John 7:17).
2. **Continually study God's Word** (Psa 1:1-2; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18). As Christians, we cannot live what we do not know, and learning God's Word necessarily precedes living His will. Therefore, from regeneration onward, we study God's Word in order to replace a lifetime of worldly viewpoint with divine viewpoint.
3. **Live by faith** (Rom 10:17; Heb 10:38; 11:6). Learning God's Word becomes effective when mixed with our faith as we apply it to all aspects of our lives. Our faith is effective when God's Word is more real than our experiences, feelings, or circumstances. The writer to the Hebrews states, "But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him" (Heb 10:38), for "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb 11:6).
4. **Accept God's trials** (Deut 8:2-3, 16; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 3:17; 4:12-13). God uses trials to strengthen our faith and develop us spiritually. Often, we don't like hardship, but we must learn to accept it as necessary. For the Lord uses it to burn away the dross of our weak character and to refine those golden qualities consistent with His character. The

growing believer learns to praise God for the trials, knowing He uses them to advance us spiritually (Rom 5:3-5; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Heb 12:11; Jam 1:2-4; 1 Pet 4:12-13).

5. **Be filled with the Spirit** (Eph 5:18). Being filled with the Holy Spirit means being controlled by Him. It means we follow where He guides, and His guidance is always according to Scripture. Being filled with the Spirit does not mean we have more of Him, but that He has more of us, as we submit to His guidance.
6. **Walk in the Spirit** (Gal 5:16-21). Walking in the Spirit means we depend on Him to sustain us as we seek to do His will according to Scripture.
7. **Restore broken fellowship with God through confession of personal sin** (1 John 1:5-9). The confessed sin is directed to God, who faithfully forgives every time (1 John 1:9).
8. **Fellowship with other believers** (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25). Spiritual growth does not happen in isolation, as God expects us to exercise our spiritual gifts for the benefit of others (see Rom 12:10-13; 14:19; Eph 4:32; Phil 2:3-4; 1 Thess 5:11-15).
9. **Serve others in love** (Gal 5:13). We are part of the body of Christ and God calls us to love and serve each other. Peter states, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10).
10. **Take advantage of the time God gives** (Eph 5:15-17; cf. 1 Pet 1:17; 4:1-2). Paul writes, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16). The believer does not reach spiritual maturity overnight, and since we have only a measure of time allotted to us by God (Psa 139:16), we must make sure our days are not wasted on meaningless pursuits, but on learning God’s Word and living His will.

As Christians, we will face ongoing worldly distractions in our lives which are designed by Satan to prevent spiritual growth. We have choices to make on a daily basis, for only we can choose to allow these distractions to stand between us and the Lord. As Christians, we experience our greatest blessings when we reach spiritual maturity and utilize the rich resources God has provided for us. However, learning takes time, as ignorance gives way to the light of God’s revelation. Frustration is often the handmaiden of ignorance, but spiritual success comes with knowledge of God and His Word.

Making Sense of the World – Part 12

Divine Institutions

Last time we met we discussed the steps to spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is characterized in the believer whose thoughts, words and actions are governed by Scripture in matters of personal choice, interpersonal relationships, marriage, family, church, education, work, leisure, economics, social involvement, ecology, and government. This assumes the Christian is living in submission to God and has devoted the necessary time and effort to learning God's Word in order to live His will.

According to Scripture, God has created divine institutions that make for a stable and productive society. A divine institution is a custom or organization that God created to advance His purposes among people. The health of a society is directly related to its adherence or rejection of divine institutions. A city or nation will experience maximum freedom with blessing from God when the majority of its citizens are supportive of divine institutions. The purpose of this lesson is to address God's divine institutions and understand how they make for stable persons and societies. As growing Christians, we desire to help promote these divine institutions for the good of all people.

1. **Responsible Dominion.** God created the human race to have responsible dominion over His creation. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen 1:26; cf. Gen 1:27-28). "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Gen 2:15; cf. 2:19-20). Currently, because of sin, the creation is not operating properly (Gen 3:17-19; Rom 8:20-22), and is not entirely subject to man's control (Heb 2:8). However, there are blessings God bestows on people, and He holds each person responsible for how they manage what He gives (1 Cor 4:7; Jam 1:17; 1 Pet 4:10).
2. **Marriage.** God created marriage as a divine institution to be enjoyed between one man and one woman. Moses wrote, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Jesus, referencing this statement by Moses, said, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt 19:6). As the first humans, Adam and Eve were created in God's image to live under His provision and authority, to walk in fellowship with Him, and to fulfill the specific purpose of ruling over His creation and multiplying and filling the earth (Gen 1:26-28). In this regard they were to complement each other. God intends the husband to lead his wife and children into God's will, and the wife is to stand with him and help him.

3. **Family.** The family is the smallest social unit intended to train succeeding generations for godliness and authority orientation. God said to His people, Israel, “These words [i.e. divine instruction], which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deu 6:6-7). Paul instructed Christian fathers at the Church in Ephesus, saying, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). The family unit is to model godly stability and transmit biblical knowledge and values to succeeding generations. Ultimately, the parents are responsible for their godly output, encouraging their children to take up and live by the instruction and example set for them.
4. **Human Government.** Human government is a divine institution with delegated authority to promote freedom, order, and to protect citizens from evil. Paul wrote, “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God...For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Rom 13:1, 4). As Christians we are to submit to governing authorities, unless they conflict with God’s authority, and then we have the duty to disobey human government, but only as we submit to God’s authority (see Dan 3:12-18; 6:1-10; Acts 4:19; 5:29). As obedient-to-the-Word Christians, it’s important we live out godly virtues, and in so doing, be peaceful and law-abiding citizens. Speaking to Christians, Paul stated, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.” (Tit 3:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 2:13-17).
5. **The Church.** The Christian Church is a divine institution which consists of born-again believers who, “as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). The church has a clearly defined body (both visible and invisible), laws (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), and leaders (1 Tim 5:17). The primary purpose of the church is to glorify God. Paul states, “we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:12), and “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever” (Eph 3:21; cf. Rom 11:36; 16:27; 1 Pet 2:5). Other purposes of the church include evangelizing the lost (Matt 28:18-20), edifying believers through biblical teaching (Eph 4:11-16), and doing good to others (Luke 6:35; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 6:17-19).

Making Sense of the World – Part 13

Where the Enemy is Attacking

Where God directs mankind, it is always for good and not evil. Satan is a disrupter and destroyer, and his world-system is set up to attack God's people, the gospel message, biblical truths and divine institutions that make for stable and productive individuals and societies. Because Christians are a minority, living in a fallen world that is under Satan's control, it is normal that we will experience conflicts and temptations that seek to disrupt our walk with the Lord and derail our spiritual life. As Christians, we must realize there will be touchpoints where we are at odds with the culture around us, and there we must stand, with absolute clarity on biblical teaching. The purpose of this lesson is to set forth those areas where Satan is currently attacking, so that we can stand on the truth of God's Word and know how we should respond when questioned or pressured to abandon them. In this way we will be a good influence on those whom God places in our path. The touchpoints are as follows:

1. **The Bible as Divinely Authoritative.** The Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, and is the basis for faith and conduct (1 Thess 2:13; cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). It teaches us how to be saved, and how to live righteously through spiritual growth and obedience to His commands. Satan's world is systemically hateful toward the Bible and seeks to suppress it, or pervert its meaning, to keep people enslaved in darkness.
2. **Christian Identity.** As those who have believed in Jesus as Savior (1 Cor 15:3-4), we are no longer "in Adam", but are "in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22; cf. 2 Cor 5:17), and our new "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). This means our Christianity identity supersedes all other forms of identity; especially those that artificially manufactured on humanistic philosophies and values that are antithetical to biblical teaching.
3. **Devotion to Learning God's Word.** God calls us to know His Word so that we will have the knowledge necessary to live His will (Deut 8:3; Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim 2:15). The world will throw up every pleasure or pressure to keep us ignorant of God's Word, in order to keep us spiritually malnourished and ineffective in our spiritual influence.
4. **The Pursuit of Spiritual Growth.** God desires that we mature as Christians by living His Word in all aspects of our lives (Eph 4:11-15; 1 Pet 2:2). Spiritual growth takes time, as we make consistent choices to gather together as Christians, study the Bible, and encourage each other to godly living.
5. **Sharing the Gospel.** We are to share the gospel that others might believe in Christ as Savior (1 Cor 15:3-4). Satan seeks to blind the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor 4:3-4), who regard the good news as foolishness (1 Cor 1:18). However, "the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

6. **Living Responsibly.** As Christians, we are to live responsibility to the Lord (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15; 19-20; 1 Cor 4:7; Jam 1:17; 1 Pet 4:10). We observe in our culture a victim mentality that tells us we are the products of evolution, history, culture, nature and/or nurture, and that we are not responsible for our desires, values, or behaviors. Christian maturity begins when we accept full responsibility for our lives and begin to make good choices to learn and live God's Word on consistent basis.
7. **Marriage as a Divine Institution.** Marriage is clearly defined in Scripture as being between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:6). However, marriage is being redefined and modified as though it were merely a social construct to be tinkered with. This is why we see a rise in divorce, as well as the introduction of same-sex marriage and polyamorous relationships.
8. **Family as a Divine Institution.** The family is the smallest social unit intended to train succeeding generations for godliness and authority orientation (Deut 6:6-7; Eph 6:4). However, many states are undermining parental authority and responsibility for the training of children, by which values are transmitted.
9. **Human Government as a Divine Institution.** Human government is a divine institution with delegated authority to promote freedom, order, and to protect citizens from evil (Gen 9:5-6; Rom 13:1-5; Tit 3:1-2; 1 Pet 2:13-17). Human government is moving beyond its delegated authority to promote freedom, order, and to protect citizens from evil.
10. **The Christian Church as a Divine Institution.** The Christian Church is a divine institution consisting of born-again believers (Eph 1:22-23; 1 Pet 2:5), who assemble locally (Heb 10:25), have laws (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), and leaders (1 Tim 5:17). The primary purpose of the church is to glorify God (Eph 1:12), evangelize the lost (Matt 28:18-20), edify believers through biblical teaching (Eph 4:11-16), and do good to others (Luke 6:35; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 6:17-19). However, the Christian Church is increasingly coming under attack by individuals, organizations, and states who desire to render it uninfluential or inoperative.
11. **God's Creation of the Universe, Earth, and People in Six Literal Days.** The Bible, plainly read and understood, teaches that God created the universe, earth, plants, animals, and people in six literal days (Gen 1:1—2:4; Ex 20: 9-11; Isa 45:12). Everything was created in a state of maturity.
12. **God's Testing.** God prefers we mature as believers and sends trials to help expedite our spiritual and moral advancement as we live by faith (Deut 8:2-3; Jam 1:2-4). But the world would have us believe pleasure is to be pursued above character. However, God is more concerned with our Christian character than our creaturely comforts, and He uses trials to burn away the dross of weak character and purify those golden qualities that reflect His character.
13. **People as Made in the Image of God.** The Bible reveals we are special, made in the image of God (Gen 1:27; 9:6), with the ability to think, act, and feel in ways

that place us above the rest of creation. Evolutionary teaching predominates in our culture, which promotes the idea that people are the product of matter, motion, time and chance.

14. **One Human Race.** Biblically, there is only one human race (Gen 1:27; 9:18-19; Acts 17:26). The idea of multiple races confuses and divides people in harmful ways, allowing for racism. However, we should see all people are part of one human race, and help them to understand that God loves them and Christ died for them.
15. **God Created Two Genders.** Biblically, there are only two genders, male and female (Gen 1:27). However, today there are teachings that gender is a matter of personal choice, and not a matter of divine design.
16. **Life Begins in the Womb at Conception.** The Bible teaches that human life begins at conception (Psa 139:13; Isa 44:24; Jer 1:5), not at a later time outside the womb. This means babies in the womb are full persons, and to abort a baby is a choice to end its human life prematurely.
17. **Israel as the Covenant People of God.** God created Israel when He called Abraham and entered into a unilateral covenant with him, promising him and his descendants the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1-3; Isa 43:1; cf. Gen 15:18; 17:8; Josh 1:2-4). Though Israel is currently under divine discipline (Matt 23:37-38), God has a future for His people and national Israel will be restored (Rom 9:1-5).
18. **Freedom.** God desires that we be free, both physically and spiritually, as this provides us the opportunity to exercise our volitions in godly ways (Gal 5:1, 13; 1 Pet 2:16). However, some people prefer servitude to freedom because they fear personal responsibility and like the idea of someone else making choices for them, watching over and caring for them.
19. **Nationalism.** God has separated the nations of the world in order to hinder the advancement of evil and human tyranny. He divided the nations by multiplying languages and confusing the efforts of defiant persons, as these tried to build the Tower of Babel by using His language and resources independently of His wishes (Gen 11:1-9). Today, many would like to see a one world government, but Christians should oppose it, realizing it's God's will that national boundaries exist (Acts 17:24).

Making Sense of the World – Part 14

Improving Culture - An OT Example

Culture represents the values, traditions and behaviors of a society, and though culture is improvable, it is not perfectible. And even where positive change occurs, it's difficult to perpetuate, largely because the people needed to sustain the change are few, flawed and temporary. A society's culture is no better or worse than its leaders and the citizenry who support them; and at the heart of every problem is the problem of the heart. Apart from regeneration and a transformed mind and will, people will default to selfishness and sin, and so social problems continue. Furthermore, if we did make great improvements, we cannot guarantee succeeding generations will follow the good pattern set for them. Below is an OT example from 2 Kings of how the nation of Judah was improved from the top down by King Josiah, a strong leader who obeyed the Lord and led his people to do the same.

The historical account in 2 Kings informs us “Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath” (2 Ki 22:1). The record of Josiah's reign was that “He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Ki 22:1-2). When Josiah began his reign as a young boy, both he and his advisors were ignorant of God's Word because it had been lost to the nation and no one knew its content. In his eighteenth year (2 Ki 22:3), Josiah sent Shaphan the scribe to the temple, saying, “Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the LORD which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people” (2 Ki 22:4). Apparently, there was money collected “from the people” of Judah to fund a renovation project at the temple (2 Ki 22:5-7). That there were citizens in Judah who did this thing would imply some positive volition toward God. It was during this renovation project that a copy of the Mosaic Law was found in the temple (2 Ki 22:8-9), and the book was brought to the king and read in his presence (2 Ki 22:10), and “When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes” (2 Ki 22:11). The Word of God that he heard touched his sensitive heart and he responded properly. Then the king commanded some of his servants to inquire of the Lord (2 Ki 22:12), saying, “Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (2 Ki 22:13). Josiah understood that Judah was experiencing God's judgment because they had been unfaithful to abide by the terms of the Mosaic contract. Josiah's servants consulted with Huldah the prophetess (2 Ki 22:14-15), who said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to

anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched” (2 Ki 22:16-17). But then she had words for Josiah, the king, saying, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Regarding the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,’ declares the LORD. ‘Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place” (2 Ki 22:18-20). Here we observe the axiom that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

As a good king, Josiah gathered the leaders and people of Judah at the temple (2 Ki 23:1-2a), and there, “read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD” (2 Ki 23:2b). This provided the divine viewpoint on their deplorable situation and why they were experience’s God’s judgment. A good leader hears God’s Word, responds positively to it, and leads others to know and walk with the Lord. Josiah acted publicly, as he “stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book” (2 Ki 23:3). This was likely a rededication to the Mosaic Covenant, to walk in obedience to the Mosaic Law. And the people responded to his leadership, “And all the people entered into the covenant” (2 Ki 23:3). The positive leadership of Josiah encouraged the people to follow him in his covenant renewal. Josiah then commanded the temple be purged of all the idols that had been placed in it and he removed the idolatrous priests who led pagan worship (2 Ki 23:4-9). Josiah destroyed the places of pagan worship which had been built by Solomon and Jeroboam, where Judahites had sacrificed their children (2 Ki 23:10-16; cf. Jer 7:31). But Josiah honored a monument that had been erected to a true prophet of the Lord (2 Ki 23:17-18). Josiah also destroyed the high places of pagan worship in the north region in Samaria and Bethel, killing the again priests who led the people into idolatry and child sacrifice (2 Ki 23:19-20). The king sought to restore the nation’s history to them by reinstating the Passover meal (2 Ki 23:21-23), which remembered God’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage at the time of the exodus under the leadership of Moses. Even people from Israel in the north came to participate in the holiday celebration (2 Chron 35:18). And so, “Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD” (2 Ki 23:24). God’s Word gives Josiah a praise report, saying, “Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Ki 23:25).

However, though Josiah was a good king and made many good reforms and led God's people into His will; yet, "the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him" (2 Ki 23:26). For the Lord declared, "I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, 'My name shall be there'" (2 Ki 23:27). Josiah was killed in battle in 608 BC and was buried in Jerusalem (2 Ki 23:28-30a). The four kings who came after Josiah wrecked all he had accomplished and led Judah toward destruction and Babylonian captivity.²⁸

Summary:

Josiah was a good king who reigned for 31 years (2 Ki 22:1-2; 23:24-25), and he committed himself to serve the Lord and to remove the deep-seated idolatry that had been implemented under the previous leadership of King Manasseh (2 Ki 21:1-6). Josiah was positive to God after hearing the Word of God, and his positive volition was marked by a commitment to God, a clear communication of Scripture to those under his charge, and decisive leadership to lead others to do God's will. Josiah removed the idols in Judah, their pagan places of devotion and those who promoted their worship. He also honored godly persons and their memorials. Sadly, though Josiah worked diligently to lead spiritual and national reforms, he could not dislodge the idolatry from the people's hearts,

²⁸ Immediately after Josiah's death, the people of Judah returned to their old ways and selected Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, to reign over them (2 Ki 23:30b). Jehoahaz was an evil king who reigned for three months (2 Ki 23:31), and "He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Ki 23:32). But God brought Jehoahaz' rule to an end in 608 BC, when God used Pharaoh Neco to imprison him in Riblah (2 Ki 23:33), before bringing him to Egypt where he died (2 Ki 23:34). Pharaoh Neco then appointed Jehoiakim as a vassal king in Judah, where he reigned for eleven years, until 597 BC. It is written about Jehoiakim, saying, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Ki 23:37). Toward the end of Jehoiakim's reign, God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah (2 Ki 24:1-5), and Jehoiakim died (2 Ki 24:6a), "and Jehoiachin his son became king in his place" (2Ki 24:6b). Jehoiachin was eighteen when he became king and he reigned only three months (2 Ki 24:8). The record of his life was, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done" (2 Ki 24:9). Nebuchadnezzar eventually laid siege against Judah, and Jehoiachin surrendered himself and went into Babylonian captivity (2 Ki 24:10-15). Nebuchadnezzar then made Zedekiah king in Judah, where he reigned for eleven years (2 Ki 24:17-18). The record of Zedekiah was, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done (2 Ki 24:19). Zedekiah was deposed in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege against Jerusalem (2 Ki 25:1-6). After capturing Zedekiah, he was taken to Riblah, and there "They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon" (2 Ki 25:7).

and they quickly returned to their evil ways after his death in 608 BC.²⁹ The four kings who followed Josiah did not imitate his faith, and Judah declined spiritually and morally for the next twenty-two years, until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC and brought God's people into Babylonian captivity for seventy years.

As Christians in leadership positions we too can respond positively when we hear God's Word, commit ourselves to serve the Lord, communicate Scripture to others, and lead those under our charge to walk with God. We can remove those pagan impediments from our homes, businesses, schools, or wherever we have authority to act. And, we can seek to lead others into God's will, respect other godly persons, and honor the memorials of those who have gone before us. This might be as a pastor to his church, a husband to a wife, parents to children, business owner to employees, coach to team, or governmental official to citizenry. But we should be aware that our actions will be met with opposition, and though we can control our godly output, the decision to follow must be freely made by those under our supervision. Furthermore, the faith of one generation does not guarantee the faith of the next, as each generation must choose to accept or reject what's been handed to them.

²⁹ Judah's national instability continued for several years as the Babylonians rose to power under the leadership of Nabopolassar, who defeated the Assyrians in 612 BC, and then his son, Nebuchadnezzar, who defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish. Judah became a vassal state under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, who took many captives to ensure their loyalty. Daniel was among the captives (Dan 1:1-6).

Making Sense of the World – Part 15

Improving Culture – A NT Example

Culture represents the values, traditions and behaviors of a society, and though culture is improvable, it is not perfectible. And even where positive change occurs, it's difficult to perpetuate, largely because the people needed to sustain the change are few, flawed and temporary. A society's culture is no better or worse than its leaders and the citizenry who support them; and at the heart of every problem is the problem of the heart. Apart from regeneration and a transformed mind and will, people will default to selfishness and sin, and so social problems continue. Furthermore, if we did make great improvements, we cannot guarantee succeeding generations will follow the good pattern set for them. Below is a NT example in Acts 19 of how the city of Ephesus was improved culturally from the bottom up, as a result of the apostle Paul's preaching the gospel and biblical teaching over several years.

The apostle Paul came to the city of Ephesus, and as was his custom, "he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Paul's normal ministry pattern was to preach to Jews first, then to Gentiles (Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 13:46; 17:2; 18:4, 19). However, there were some Jews with negative volition who rejected Paul's teaching, who "were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people" (Acts 19:9a). Paul did not argue with them, nor did he try to force his teaching on them. Rather, "he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9b). It's very possible Paul was renting a room at the school in order to host his daily Bible classes. Luke tells us, "This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Though Paul was teaching, he continued to work with his hands to support himself and his traveling companions (Acts 20:34), and it's possible the seven churches of Asia were started as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; Rev. 2-3). In addition to Paul's teaching, we learn "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out" (Acts 19:11-12). In this way, God was authenticating Paul's apostolic authority and validating him as a true servant of the Lord. Ephesus was a city known for its occult practices, and there were some unbelievers who thought they could borrow the name of Jesus and use it to advance their own agendas. We learn there were some "Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, [and] attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches'" (Acts 19:13). These men were identified as "Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this" (Acts 19:14). But the results were not what they expected, as "the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'" (Acts 19:15). The question implied they

had no authority, “And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:16). Though these exorcists tried to use the name of Jesus in the form of a verbal incantation to control evil spirits, it backfired on them and caused personal harm, and the event “became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified” (Acts 19:17). The failure of these Jewish exorcists became widely publicized and began to draw people to hear the Christian message. Furthermore, many of “those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices” (Acts 19:18). Those who “had believed” were Christians who had not completely let go of some of their pagan practices, but now they were willing. Luke records, “And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19). Though it took nearly two years, these Christians were finally willing to let go of their past practices by burning their magic books and turning fully to the Lord. The value of these books totaled a large financial sum, as each piece of silver was probably equal to a day’s wage. “Ephesus was known for its magic, and apparently the Christians had not yet put away all such evil practices. So they brought their books and scrolls of magic and burned them as an open repudiation. Then—after the believers made their relationships with the Lord right—the Word of God grew and prevailed.”³⁰ The result was that people were being transformed from the inside out and Ephesian culture was positively impacted for Christ, as “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (Acts 19:8-20). Here we see cultural improvement in the lives of those who were positive to gospel preaching and biblical teaching.

These events marked the high point of Paul’s ministry in Asia. However, some pagan craftsmen who made their living selling statuettes of Artemis felt threatened by the cultural changes that were taking place (Acts 19:23-27). Acting out of rage and economic self-interest, they formed a mob and stormed the city theater, even dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul’s traveling companions, who undoubtedly felt threatened by the uproar (Acts 19:28-29). Paganism has no real answers to Christianity, and when threatened, many will resort to violence to suppress the advance of truth. Though Paul wanted to address the mob, he was prevented by friends who were concerned about his safety (Acts 19:30-31). The riot lasted for several hours with great intensity (Acts 19:32-34), until eventually the crowd tired out, at which time a city official reasoned with them to bring their complaints to the courts, where matters could be handled lawfully and peacefully (Acts 19:35-41). These events likely occurred between 52-55 AD. We know Paul was marked by these events (2 Cor 1:8-9), and by the end of his ministry around 62-

³⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Acts of the Apostles*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), 102.

64 AD, everyone who once supported him in Ephesus turned away from him (2 Tim 1:15). By 95 AD the church in Ephesus had grown cold and lost its “first love” (Rev 2:4).

In this pericope we observe that gospel preaching and biblical teaching can, over time, bring about positive cultural change. However, we must keep our focus on evangelism and biblical teaching, and not reducing Christianity to a methodological system merely for the purpose of effecting social change (i.e. a social gospel). We also observe in Acts 19 that when Christianity does bring about positive cultural change, it threatens those who love and live by their paganism, and when this happens, people may resort to violence to suppress the biblical teaching. Lastly, gospel preaching and biblical teaching does not always yield large or lasting results. Remember that Noah preached for 120 years, but only seven persons besides himself were saved (2 Pet 2:5), and Jeremiah preached for 23 years to the same group of leaders in Israel, but they refused to listen (Jer 25:3). Jesus came as the Light into the world, but the majority of those who heard and saw Him rejected His message, as they “loved the darkness rather than the Light” (John 3:19). Jesus informed us that “the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it” (Matt 7:13), whereas “the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt 7:14). The result is that there will continually be believers and unbelievers in the world, as the wheat and tares will grow side by side until Jesus returns and establishes His earthly millennial kingdom (Matt 13:36-42). Even Paul did not always get the same results in each city where he preached, for though he had many disciples in Iconium, Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe (read Acts 14), there were only two positive responses in Philippi, namely Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:27-34). As Christians, we are more concerned about our godly output rather than the responsive outcomes of those we interact with; for though we can control our godly life and good message, we cannot control how others will respond to it.

Lastly, we live in the reality that there will always be resistance to God’s work in every Christian ministry because the world is fallen and Satan desperately wants to keep everyone—both saved and lost—thinking and acting according to his world-system. New Christians will inevitably face many obstacles, because at the moment of salvation, their minds are not automatically filled with Scripture and their characters are not instantly changed to be like the character of Christ. The process of being transformed into the character of Christ and learning to think biblically involves many thousands of decisions over a lifetime, in which worldly viewpoint is driven from the mind as the believer’s thinking is renovated and brought into conformity with Scripture. Without regeneration and positive volition to God and His Word, biblical discussion is hindered and the appropriation of Christian values to culture is not possible. Christians who are learning God’s Word and growing spiritually will prove to be the moral fabric of any community, as they manifest the highest and best virtues within society, not the lowest and worst. And

the Bible is our sword by which we destroy spiritual and intellectual strongholds, within ourselves and others (2 Cor 10:3-6), realizing true cultural change occurs through preaching the gospel and consistent biblical teaching. As Christians, we should always pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2), strive to be upstanding citizens (Rom 13:1-7; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14), help the needy in our communities (Acts 20:35; 1 Thess 5:14), and above all, share the gospel and preach God's Word (1 Cor 15:3-4; 2 Tim 4:1-2). As we grow spiritually and walk with God, we stand in opposition to Satan's world-system and sow the seeds of spiritual insurrection in the lives of those who live and walk in his kingdom of darkness. We disrupt Satan's kingdom when we share the Gospel (1 Cor 15:3-4), and influence the thoughts and lives of others through biblical discussion (Matt 28:18-20); which we do in love and grace (Eph 4:14-15; Col 4:6), not by argumentation (2 Tim 2:24-26).

Making Sense of the World – Part 16

The Gospel We Share

The apostle Paul made a clear presentation of the gospel message when he wrote to the church at Corinth. He stated, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel [εὐαγγέλιον *euaggelion* – good news message] which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2).³¹ The gospel is information that is communicable from one person to another, whether by spoken or written means. It is received as factual information that benefits the recipient who accepts it by faith. Paul then provided the content of the gospel, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

The gospel is best understood as the solution to a problem. There are two parts to the problem. *First*, God is holy (Ps. 99:9; Isa. 6:3), which means He is positively righteous and can have nothing to do with sin except to condemn it. The Scripture states, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Hab 1:13), and “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). *Second*, all mankind is sinful and separated from God (Rom. 3:10-23). This separation occurred when Adam sinned and brought death into the world. Scripture informs us that “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12; cf. 18-19; 1 Cor 15:21-22).³² The idea is that Adam served as the federal and seminal head of the human race, and when he fell, we fell with him. Because of sin, every person is spiritually separated from God and helpless to change their situation (Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1), and good works have no saving merit before the Lord (Isa 64:6; Rom 4:1-5; Gal 2:16; 3:21; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). We cannot save ourselves any more than we can jump

³¹ The word *vain* translates the Greek word εἰκῆ *eike*, which denotes, “being without careful thought, without due consideration, in a haphazard manner” (BDAG, p. 281). The main thrust of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 concerns the resurrection of Jesus, which is an essential part of the gospel message. Yet, there were some within the church who were saying “there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:12). Paul asserts, “if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (1 Cor 15:13-14). The point is, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; [and] you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). Denying the resurrection of Jesus meant they had believed in a Jesus that could not save them, because the object of their faith was dead, and therefore powerless to help them. Getting the gospel message right matters.

³² Being born in Adam, we also possess a sin nature which is the source of our rebellious heart (Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), and we produce personal sin each time we yield to temptation (Jam 1:14-15).

across the Grand Canyon or throw rocks and hit the moon. But God, because of His mercy and love toward us (John 3:16; Eph 2:4-7), did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He provided His own solution to the problem of sin, and this was worked out through His Son, Jesus, who became human and accomplished what we could not.

Jesus solved both problems: 1) He lived the righteous life that God demands and committed no sin, and 2) He died for us on the cross, as our substitute, and paid the penalty for all our sins. God the Son—the second Person of the Trinity—came into the world by human birth (Luke 1:26-35), and lived a perfectly righteous life (Matt 5:17-21). Scripture informs us that Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21), “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet He did not sin” (Heb 4:15), and “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). Being sinless qualified Him to go to the cross and die for us. No one forced Jesus to go to the cross; rather, He willingly laid down His life and died in our place, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). We are redeemed, not by anything this world can offer or by anything we can do, but His “precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19). The blood of Christ is the coin of the heavenly realm that pays our sin debt and liberates us from the slave-market of sin. But we must trust in Jesus as our Savior. We must accept His good work on our behalf. Though Jesus’ atoning work on the cross is sufficient for all (John 1:29; Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), it is effectual only for those who believe in Him (John 3:16-18; 20:31; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31). If we reject Christ as Savior, the result is that we will be forever separated from the Lord (Rev 20:11-15). For “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). At the cross, He judged my sin as His righteousness requires, and saves me, the sinner, as His love desires. He did this out of His own goodness and mercy, and not because of any worth found in me. To comprehend the cross of Christ is to understand the heart of God toward a fallen world He wants to save.

Salvation is completely the work of God, and comes to us as a free gift from God (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5), as we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14), positionally identified with Him (Rom 5:14-18; 1 Cor 15:22), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28), given the gift of God’s righteousness (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and have the power to live righteously (Rom 6:1-13). God saves us from the penalty of sin (John 5:24; Rom 6:23; 8:1), the power of sin (Rom 6:11; 8:13; 2 Cor 5:17), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2). God has prepared good works to follow our salvation (Eph 2:10), but they are never the condition of it. The matter is simple: Salvation comes to us who believe in Christ as our Savior, believing He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third.

Making Sense of the World – Part 17

The Life of Faith

Living by faith is the Christian way. God expects us to trust Him at His word, which is plainly understood, believed, and applied. Studying the Bible and applying it to life are comparable to breathing in and breathing out, as both are necessary for living. Much of our mental and social stability depends on how well we know the Word of God and apply it to life. The Lord states, “My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him” (Heb 10:38).³³ And we know that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb 11:6). Scripture reveals that only God and His Word are absolutely true (Psa 119:160; John 17:17), and never fail (Matt 24:35; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18). In contrast, we learn that people fail (Jer 17:5; cf. Pro 28:26), money fails (Psa 62:10), the government fails (Psa 146:3), and the creation fails (Matt 24:35). As we look at the Greek New Testament, we see how the word *faith* is used three ways:

1. Faith, as a verb (πιστεύω *pisteuo*),³⁴ means “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust.”³⁵ It means to believe, trust, or have confidence in God (Heb 11:6; cf. Rom 4:3), Jesus (Acts 16:31; 1 Pet 1:8), and Scripture (John 2:22). Unreliable people should not be trusted (Matt 24:23, 26; John 2:24).
2. Faith, as a noun (πίστις *pistis*), often refers to “that which evokes trust and faith...the state of being someone in whom confidence can be placed, faithfulness, reliability, fidelity.”³⁶ The word is used with reference to God who is trustworthy (Rom 3:3; 4:19-21), and of people who possess faith (Matt 9:2, 22; 21:21), which can be great (Matt 15:28; cf. Acts 6:5; 11:23-24), small (Matt 17:19-20), or absent (Mark 4:39-40; cf. Luke 8:25). It is also used of Scripture itself as a body of reliable teaching (i.e. Acts 14:22; 16:5; Rom 14:22; Gal 1:23; 2 Tim 4:7).
3. Faith, as an adjective (πιστός *pistos*), describes someone “pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith.”³⁷ The word is used both of man (Matt 25:23; 1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:7; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:2; Heb 3:5), and God (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23; Rev 1:5).

³³ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotes are from the New American Standard Bible.

³⁴ Though I’m looking at the Greek, it should be noted that the Hebrew אָמַן *aman* carries the same basic meaning as πιστεύω *pisteuo*. In fact, the LXX translates Genesis 15:6—a passage quoted by NT writers (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23)—by using the Greek verb πιστεύω *pisteuo*.

³⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 816.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 818.

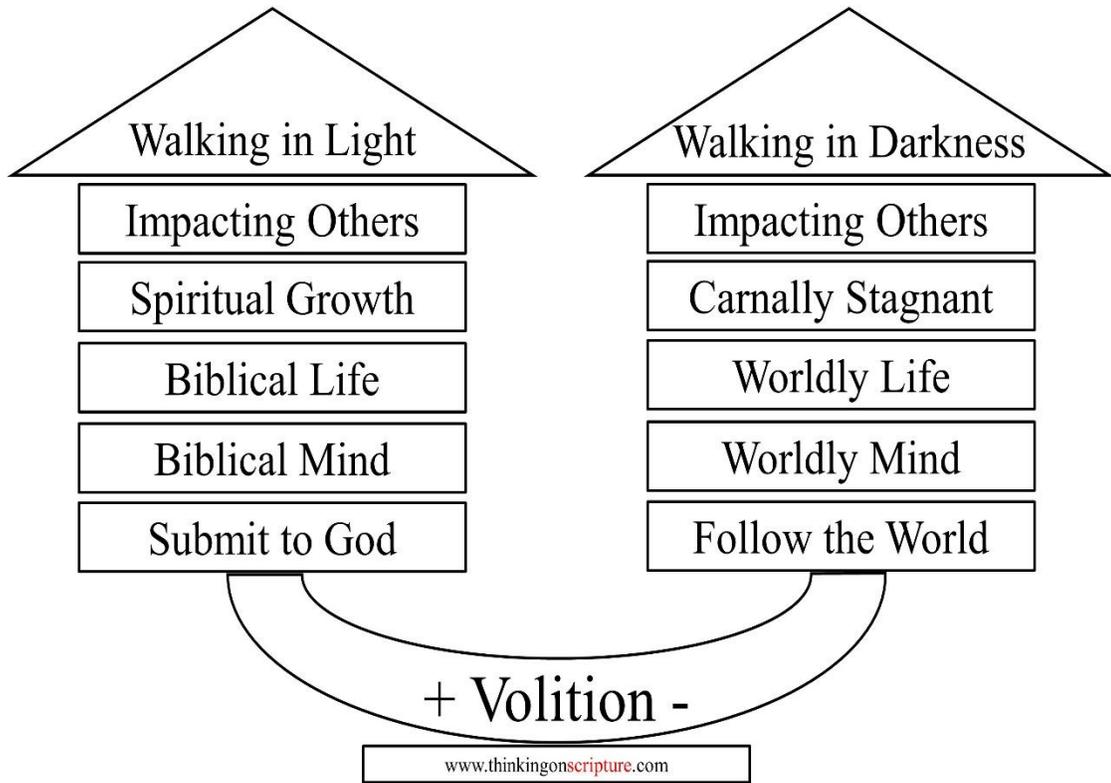
³⁷ *Ibid.*, 820.

Biblical facts about faith:

1. Faith demands an object (Acts 16:30-31).
2. Faith is exercised with a view to receiving a benefit (John 3:16).
3. The object of faith gets the credit (Rom 4:19-21).
4. Salvation comes by faith in Jesus (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:8-9).
5. Faith is the only thing that pleases God (Heb 11:6).
6. God expects us to live by faith (Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38).
7. Faith is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).
8. By faith we apply the word of God (Matt 7:24-25; John 13:17; Jam 1:22).
9. By faith we claim promises (Heb 6:11-12; 2 Pet 1:4).
10. It is possible to have God's promises and not benefit from them (Heb 4:2).
11. Our faith will be tested (1 Pet 1:6-7).
12. Our faith overcomes fear (Deut 31:6-8; Isa 41:10-13).
13. Trusting God produces mental stability (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:6-11).
14. Faith can be strengthened by others (Acts 14:21-22; 16:5; Rom 1:12)

Faith in God results in a change of attitude and actions about everything. By faith, “we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” (Heb 11:3). By faith we have confidence that God controls the circumstances of our lives, that He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Rom 8:28). Even the trials we face help to produce humility (Dan 4:37; Matt 23:12), and develop the character of God in us (Rom 5:1-5). James wrote, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam 1:2-4). Such a faith response makes us better rather than bitter. By faith we obey God's commands to love and serve (Gal 5:13), be tolerant (Eph 4:2), kind, tenderhearted and forgiving (Eph 4:32), and to regard others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

Satan, and his world-system, will strive to get the believer to rely upon anything and everything other than God and His Word. If the believer falls into this trap, he will experience worry, frustration, anxiety, and eventually a deep-rooted sense of despair. God wants us to have mental stability (Isa 26:3), love (1 John 4:16-17), contentment (Phil 4:11-13), and every other attitude that brings an abundant life (John 10:10). Only through a life of faith can we know the blessings that belong to every Christian.



Making Sense of the World – Part 18

A Christian View of Death

As Christians, we will leave this world either by death or rapture. Excluding Enoch and Elijah (Gen 5:21-24; 2 Ki 2:11), human mortality is 100%. However, like Enoch and Elijah, we too may be spared the experience of death, if we are part of the generation of Christians that are caught up to meet the Lord in the air at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18).

Death is an uncomfortable subject, but for those who trust in the Lord, it need not be. God knows how frail we are, “He is mindful that we are *but* dust” (Psa 103:14). David courageously asked the Lord, “Make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days short in length, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath” (Psa 39:4-5). Job too perceived the brevity of his life and declared, “I will not live forever...for my days are *but* a breath” (Job 7:16), and James wrote, “you are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Jam 4:14b). Leaving this world is inevitable; where we spend eternity is optional. God loves us and sent His Son into the world that He would provide eternal life for us. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17).

Death was introduced into God’s creation when the first human, Adam, sinned against God. Adam’s sin immediately brought spiritual death (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7), and later, physical death (Gen 5:5). Though Adam was made spiritually alive again (Gen 3:21), his single sin introduced death, in every form, into the world (Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:21-22). **Death means separation.** Three major kinds of death are mentioned in Scripture:

1. **Spiritual death**, which is separation from God in time. Spiritually dead people continue to live until they die physically (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-7; 5:5; Eph 2:1-2; Col 2:13-14).
2. **Physical death**, which is the separation of the soul from the body (Eccl 12:7; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23-24; 2 Tim 4:6). Though the body ceases to function, the soul moves to a new location, consciously awaiting the resurrection of the body.
3. **Eternal death** (aka the “second death”), which is the perpetuation of physical and spiritual separation from God for all eternity (Rev 20:11-15).

All persons born into this world are physically alive, but spiritually dead, separated from God, because of Adam’s sin. The Bible reveals, “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [when Adam sinned]” (Rom 5:12), and “in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive”

(1 Cor 15:22). Though we are all dead in Adam, God offers new life when we turn to Christ as Savior, reconciling us to Himself through the death of His Son (Rom 5:1-2). Adam's sin brought death, and Christ's death brings life. In Adam I am guilty, in Christ I am righteous. For the Christian, death is not the final victor in eternity. Every person, whether saved or unsaved, will receive a resurrection body that will live forever. Believers will enjoy eternal union with God, but unbelievers will suffer eternal separation from Him. Only those who are *born again*—by the Spirit of God—have eternal life and will spend forever in heaven (1 Pet 1:3, 23). Eternal life is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). It's a free gift from God, paid in full by the Lord Jesus (John 19:30), who died for us on the cross and paid the penalty for all our sins, so that we don't have to pay for them ourselves.

Scripture reveals God is sovereign over all His creation, either causing or permitting whatsoever comes to pass. God is sovereign over all creation, which means there are no accidental people or events in history. God creates life (Gen 2:7; Job 1:21; Psa 100:3; Acts 17:24-25; Rev 11:11) and controls death (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-8; 6:17; 2 Ki 5:7; Luke 12:20; Rev 1:18). The Lord declares, "See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal" (Deut 32:39). And, "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6). God holds final control over our lives, from beginning to end, and preordains our days on the earth. David wrote, "In Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psa 139:16). God's sovereign control over life and death includes our choices and the choices of others. He desires that we think and act in conformity with His revealed will, but in many cases, He permits us to act, either good or bad, and to reap the consequences of our choices. At physical death, all of life's decisions are fixed for eternity, and what we do with Christ determines our eternal destiny (John 3:16-18; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Eph 2:8-9). It has been said that procrastination is the thief of time and opportunity, and when one procrastinates about the gospel, it becomes the thief of souls. Please don't delay. Trust Christ as Savior today and receive eternal life, believing the gospel that He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). And, like the thief on the cross who trusted in Jesus, you can be assured your soul will immediately go into the presence of God at death (Luke 23:43; cf. 2 Cor 5:8).

Making Sense of the Future – Part 19

The Rapture of the Church

The Bible reveals Jesus will return to earth; however, a distinction must be drawn between Jesus coming *for* His saints at the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Thess 2:1-3a; Tit 2:13), and Jesus coming *with* His saints at His Second Coming to reign for a thousand years (Dan 7:13-14; Matt 19:28; 25:31; Rev 19:11-21). There are basically five views on the rapture of the church which are held by Bible scholars.

1. **Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** The church is taken out of the world before the Tribulation begins.
2. **Partial Rapture:** Only believers who faithfully watch for the Lord's return will be raptured out of the world before the Tribulation.
3. **Mid-Tribulation Rapture:** The church is taken out of the world in the middle of the Tribulation.
4. **Pre-Wrath Rapture:** The church is taken out of the world before God's wrath is greatest, just before Christ returns to establish His earthly kingdom.
5. **Post-Tribulation Rapture:** The church is raptured up as Christ is returning to earth at His Second Coming.

The doctrine of the Rapture was first presented by the Lord Jesus when He provided new information to His apostles on the night before His crucifixion. After speaking of His soon departure (John 13:33), Jesus comforted them, saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). The place where Jesus was going was heaven. The purpose of His going was to prepare a place for them. And, at some unspecified time, Jesus promised He would come again to receive them to Himself, that they may be with Him.

Paul explained to the church at Corinth that the changing of our bodies at the Lord's return was a *mystery*. Paul said, "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 imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:51-53). The word *mystery* translates the Greek word *μυστήριον* *musterion*, which means "the unmanifested or private counsel of God, (God's) secret, the secret thoughts,

plans, and dispensations of God.”³⁸ A mystery was something “which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints” (Col 1:26). What Paul revealed for the first time—not found in the OT—pertained to the physical transformation that occurs at the Rapture, that our mortal bodies will be transformed into immortal ones.

Paul described a time in which Christians will be raptured out of the world and taken to heaven. He explained, “the dead in Christ shall rise first [i.e. be resurrected]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up [ἁρπάζω *harpazo*] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16b-17). The meaning of ἁρπάζω *harpazo* is “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away.”³⁹ The form of the Greek verb is passive, which means the Christian will offer no resistance when the Lord removes His church in a moment, without notice, and by force.

The Latin translation of this verse used the word *rapturo*. The Greek word it translates is *harpazō*, which means to snatch or take away. Elsewhere it is used to describe how the Spirit caught up Philip near Gaza and brought him to Caesarea (Acts 8:39) and to describe Paul’s experience of being caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2–4). Thus, there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.⁴⁰

Some have asserted that the Rapture is not a biblical doctrine because, they argue, the word *Rapture* is not mentioned in the English Bible. However, the word *Rapture* comes from the words “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. This verse could be translated, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be *raptured* together with them in the clouds.” The important point is that the verse says Christ will come for believers and take them from the earth to heaven, where they will be in His presence till they return with Him to the earth to reign. The Rapture will mean that all believers “will be with the Lord forever,” enjoying Him and His presence for all eternity.⁴¹

³⁸ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 662.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁰ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 537.

⁴¹ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1265.

Paul reaffirmed his teaching of the Rapture in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica. Apparently, someone had upset the Christians living in Thessalonica by writing a false letter, as if from Paul, that the Rapture had already occurred and their suffering was a result of entering into the time of the Tribulation. Paul said, “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him [at the Rapture], that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us [i.e. a false letter], to the effect that the day of the Lord has come [day of the Lord = seven year Tribulation]” (2 Thess 2:1-2). Paul explained the Rapture could not have occurred yet, saying, “for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first” (2 Thess 2:3a). The word *apostasy* translates the Greek word *ἀποστασία* *apostasia*, which is believed by the majority of scholars today to refer to a special end-time rebellion against biblical teaching. Though this departure from God’s Word will happen in the days leading up to the Rapture (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 4:3-4; 2 Pet 3:3-6), it is argued—quit convincingly—by some Bible scholars that the word *ἀποστασία* *apostasia* is better understood as referring to the physical departure of the church at the time of the Rapture.⁴² Dr. Thomas Ice states:

I believe that there is a strong possibility that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is speaking of the rapture. What do I mean? Some pretribulationists, like myself, think that the Greek noun *apostasia*, usually translated “apostasy,” is a reference to the rapture and should be translated “departure.” Thus, this passage would be saying that the day of the Lord will not come until the rapture comes before it. If *apostasia* is a reference to a physical departure, then 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is strong evidence for pretribulationism.⁴³

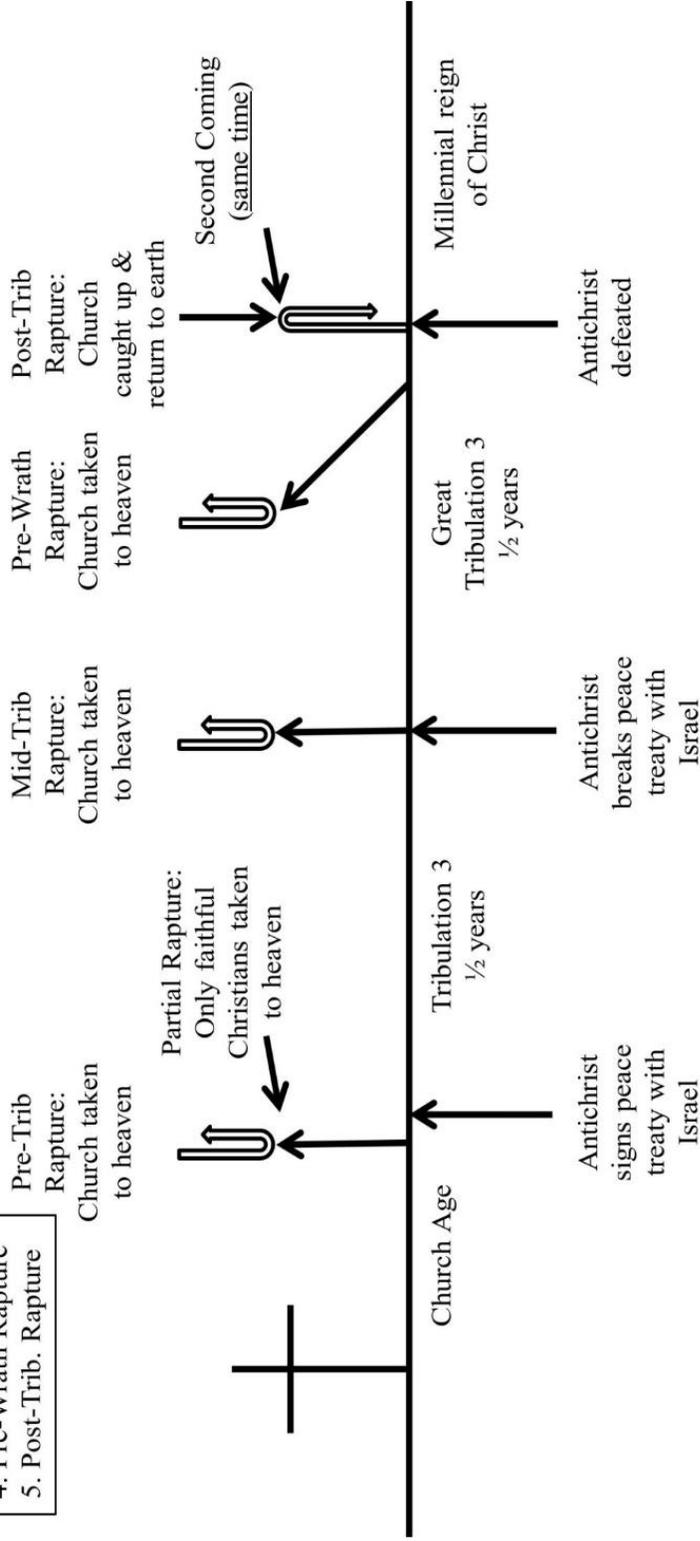
The above passages, taken as a whole, argue convincingly that we are “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit 2:13). The appearing of Christ at the Rapture is what the Christian is looking for, since that is the next prophetic event to come. This Rapture is immanent, meaning it may occur at any time and without prior notice. All Christians who are alive at the time of the Rapture will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, will go with Him to heaven, and be spared the wrath to be poured out during the seven-year Tribulation. Our future is not one of judgment; rather, we are assured we will be spared God’s future wrath, both in time and eternity (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10).

⁴² Among these are Dr. E. Schuyler English, Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, Dr. Thomas Ice, Dr. Andy Woods, Dr. Paul Lee Tan, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Dr. Dave Olander, and others.

⁴³ Thomas Ice, “The Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3” (2009). *Article Archives*. 82. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/82.

1. Pre-Trib. Rapture
2. Partial Rapture
3. Mid-Trib. Rapture
4. Pre-Wrath Rapture
5. Post-Trib. Rapture

Five Views on the Rapture



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Making Sense of the Future - Part 20

Future Christian Rewards

Salvation is the work the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' atoning death on the cross propitiated the Father's demands toward our sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2), and we come with the empty hands of faith, trusting in Christ alone to save us (John 3:16; 20:31 Acts 4:12). The gospel is the good news "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). Good works should follow salvation, but they are never the condition of it (Rom 4:1-5; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). Once saved, the Lord calls us to "be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph 1:4), and to engage in "good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph 2:10). As Christians, we are to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10), for He instructs us "to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Tit 2:12), and to be a people "zealous for good deeds" (Tit 2:14).

Our loyal obedience to God is in appreciation for all He has done for us. It's a "Thank You" response to His grace and goodness. As an added benefit, God promises future rewards to the Christian who walks in His will. But, to be clear, not all rewards are the same, as they are given in proportion to the life of obedience. When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples (Matt 5:1-2), He said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11-12). A reward (Grk μισθός *misthos*) denotes "a recompense based upon what a person has earned and thus deserves."⁴⁴ Though salvation is free and simple, eternal rewards are earned. A little later, Jesus explained that there will be distinctions in heaven based on the believer's obedience or disobedience to His will, saying, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19). Being IN the kingdom of heaven connotes an end of life location, as this will be the final resting place for all believers. But the distinctions of being "least" or "great" in heaven are the result of the believer's disobedience or obedience to God, and their instructing others to do the same.

Paul taught the Christians at Corinth that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be evaluated for our works. Paul was a "wise master builder" who shared the

⁴⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 490.

gospel with others and laid the foundation, which is Christ (1 Cor 3:10-11). Paul spoke of the believer who “builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor 3:12). The composition of material is distinguished between what is precious and what is worthless. And a day is coming, when “each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor 3:13). And if the “man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward [Grk μισθός *misthos*]” (1 Cor 3:14), being justly compensated for his work. However, “If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss [of reward]; but he himself will be saved [eternally], yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15). The phrase suffer loss translates the Greek word ζημιόω *zemioo*, which means “to experience the loss of something, with implication of undergoing hardship or suffering, suffer damage/loss, forfeit, sustain injury.”⁴⁵ The apostle John also taught that rewards can be lost if the believer succumbs to false teachers (2 John 1:7-8).

Jesus taught that we should look to the future and think in terms of storing up rewards in heaven, saying, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19-21). We all spend our time, efforts, and resources investing in something we consider will bring a good return on investment. Biblically, there is no greater investment to be made than learning and living God’s Word, and instructing others to do the same. The growing Christian thinks more and more about investing in God’s work, realizing he/she will receive an eternal reward from the Father.

After the Rapture of the church to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Thess 2:1-3a; Tit 2:13), believers will be judged for their works (Matt 5:12; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). As Christians, we are to inspect our own fruit and not the fruit of others. For this reason, Paul comments, “why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom 14:10). All Christians “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). This judgment is not to determine who gets into heaven, for that problem has already been settled by Christ, who died in our place and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us. Rather, the judgment is to determine rewards for eternity. “The question is often raised how one’s sins can be forgiven and yet one’s deeds reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ. Forgiveness

⁴⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 428.

concerns justification; the review concerns rewards, and after the review is made there will be no sorrow or tears because there are none in heaven.”⁴⁶

Rewards are offered by God to a believer on the basis of faithful service rendered after salvation. It is clear from Scripture that God offers to the lost salvation and for the faithful service of the saved, rewards. Often in theological thinking salvation and rewards are confused. However, these two terms must be carefully distinguished. Salvation is a free gift (John 4:10; Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9), whereas rewards are earned by works (Matt 10:42; cf. Luke 19:17; 1 Cor 9:24-25; 2 Tim 4:7-8). Then, too, salvation is a present possession (Luke 7:50; John 5:24). On the other hand, rewards are future attainment to be dispensed at the second coming of Christ for His own (Matt 16:27; 2 Tim 4:8). Rewards will be dispensed at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10).⁴⁷

We don't know what many of the rewards will be. That is for Christ to determine and dispense at that time. However, we are aware of crowns that will be given to some who are faithful, such as: **the imperishable crown** given to those who exercise self-control in godliness (1 Cor 9:24-27), **the crown of exaltation** for those who bring others to Christ (1 Thes 2:19), **the crown of righteousness** to those who love His appearing (2 Tim 4:7-8), **the crown of glory** given to elders who faithfully execute their service in the church (1 Pet 5:4), and **the crown of life** given to those who endure testing because they love the Lord (Jam 1:12; cf. Rev 2:10). In the future, there is a heavenly description of “twenty-four elders who will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne” (Rev 4:10). These will cast their crowns as an expression of worship to the Lord, saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created” (Rev 4:11). If crowns are only given to those who live righteously, then this means some will have greater capacity for worship than others, as what we give is in proportion to what we have.

This rewarding is a display of God's righteous character, for “God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints” (Heb 6:10). As Christians, we know our “toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58), and that we will reap what has been sown during our lifetime (Gal 6:7-8). For this reason, Paul says, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal 6:9). God graciously

⁴⁶ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

⁴⁷ Merrill F. Unger, “Rewards,” ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1080.

permits us to share in His work on earth, and then rewards us for our participation. God's rewards are a reflection of his goodness and He is pleased to give them, like He does all good things. Eternal rewards manifest His glory in our lives, and will be manifest in the Church, the Bride of Christ, at His second coming (Rev 19:8).

OT saints will be rewarded as well (Dan 12:1-3), perhaps at the Second Coming of Jesus, alongside the saints who survive the Tribulation, whose "deeds follow with them" (Rev 14:13). These are evaluated just prior to Jesus' millennial kingdom, in which He separates the sheep from goats (Matt 25:31-46), to determine who will enter the kingdom and reign with Him (Rev 20:4-6). Whether OT or NT saints, all believers will be judged as Jesus declares, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev 22:12). Unbelievers will be judged after the millennial kingdom, but theirs is a judgment for eternal suffering (Rev 20:11-15). And it appears from certain passages in Scripture that some unbelievers will suffer more than others (Matt 10:15; 11:20-24; Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11). Since God is just, it would make sense that punishment for unbelievers would be in proportion to the degree of how sinfully they lived after rejecting the gospel.

Summary:

Christ has secured our salvation through the substitutionary atoning death of Christ who shed His blood at the cross and propitiated every righteous demand the Father has toward us (Rom 3:25). Having trusted Christ as Savior (John 3:16), we now have peace with God (Rom 5:1). However, after salvation, God expects us to learn His Word, live righteously (Tit 2:11-14), and encourage others to do the same (Heb 11:24-25). After the Rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18), all Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be evaluated for how we lived our lives (2 Cor 5:9-10). This evaluation is not a judgment concerning the Christian's right to enter heaven as the place of eternal residence, for Christ has secured our salvation and there is no fear of condemnation before God (John 3:18). Rather, it is a judgment concerning eternal rewards for the life we've lived in service to Christ (1 Cor 3:10-15). Apparently, we must stay the course in faithfulness, otherwise we run the risk of losing part of our reward (2 John 1:8). Those who learned God's Word, lived His will, and taught others to do the same, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. But those believers who disobeyed God's Word and taught others to disobey as well will be called least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:19).

Making Sense of the Future – Part 21

The Coming Antichrist

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

The apostle John spoke of an antichrist that is coming sometime in the future. He also spoke of “many antichrists” that have already appeared. The many antichrists refer to false teachers, “those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7). These existed in John’s day, and they exist in our day as well. But these antichrists—as dangerous as they are—are only little examples of the one who will come in the future. The word *antichrist* translates the Greek ἀντίχριστος *antichristos*, which denotes one who stands *in the place of* Christ and *opposes* Him. The apostle John mentions “many antichrists” that have come into the world (1 John 2:18b). These all deny that Jesus is the Messiah (1 John 2:22a), rejecting both the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22b), refuting that Jesus is from God (1 John 4:3), and rejecting Jesus’ incarnation as the God-Man (2 John 1:7). These are all types of the Antichrist who is mentioned several times throughout Scripture (Dan 7:7-8, 24-26; 9:27; 11:36-45; Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-12; 1 John 2:18; Rev 13:1-8; 17:3, 7-8, 11-13; 19:19-20; 20:10). This particular person will arise and come to power during the seven-year Tribulation which begins shortly after the Rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18), which will leave only a professing church behind (i.e. Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other groups who take the name “Christian”).

Daniel describes the Antichrist as one who has a big mouth and utters great boasts. During his time of power, he will “speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time” (Dan 7:25). Theologically he claims to be God (2 Thess 2:3-4), and politically he will try to rule the world as God (Dan 11:36-37; Rev 13). Paul describes him as “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship” and displays himself “as being God” (2 Thess 2:3-4). And he’s not alone, as his 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, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess 2:9-10). In addition, the Antichrist will be accompanied by a false prophet who serves as his propaganda agent and enforcer, persecuting any who do not submit to his tyranny (Rev 13:11-12). The false prophet will be Satanically enabled to perform signs and wonders (Rev 13:13), to deceive the whole world (Rev 13:14), kill those who do not worship the Antichrist (Rev 13:15), and control the world’s economic systems as a means of tyranny (Rev 13:16-17).

The Period of Peace

The Antichrist will likely be a Gentile (Rev 13:1). He will be identified only after the rapture of the church (2 Thess 2:3-10), when he brokers a Middle-East peace treaty between Israel and her neighbors (Dan 9:27). This may happen because he has the military power to enforce such a peace agreement. It is implied in Scripture that the Jewish temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices will be reinstated (Dan 9:27; 2 Thess 2:3-4). “Prophetically it is most significant that we already have on earth the United Nations, a weak form of a single worldwide government. This or something similar to it may be Satan’s instrument for preparing the world to accept a world government under the Antichrist.”⁴⁸

The Period of Persecution

The Antichrist will break the peace treaty with Israel half way through the seven-year Tribulation and will take political control of the nations of the world and set up a global economic and religious system which he controls (Rev 13:7, 16-17). This begins the period of worldwide persecution known as the great Tribulation (Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14). During this time the Antichrist will set himself up in the Jewish temple as god (2 Thess 2:4) and will persecute all who do not worship him (Rev 13:8, 15). God will pour out great judgments upon the earth and the vast majority of mankind will be destroyed (Revelation chapters 6-18). The troubles of the world will cease only when Christ returns (Rev 19:11-21).

The Judgment of Antichrist

The Antichrist, false prophet, world rulers and their armies, will be defeated by Christ at His Second Coming (Rev 19:11-21). Then, the Antichrist and his false prophet will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20). Later, after the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:1-6), Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:7-10), along with all unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15; cf. Matt 25:41). This demonstrates that God is in sovereign control over His creation, and though He permits sin and rebellion for a time, He eventually closes the door on evil when He destroys the current heavens and earth and creates a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1). For, “according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

⁴⁸ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1321.

Making Sense of the Future – Part 22

The Seven Year Tribulation

There is coming a future time of tribulation upon the earth. Its severity is without historical precedent. Concerning this time, the angel, Gabriel, told Daniel, that it “will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (Dan 12:1a). This time of tribulation is in keeping with unfulfilled prophecy given to Daniel that pertains to Israel (Dan 9:24-27). It is during this time that God’s wrath will be poured out upon the world—specifically those who are hostile to Him and His people.

Seventy weeks [i.e. 490 years] have been decreed for your people [Israel] and your holy city [Jerusalem], to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity [fulfilled by Christ as His first coming], to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place [to be fulfilled by Christ at His second coming].²⁵ So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem [fulfilled by Artaxerxes Longimanus on March 5, 444 BC; see Neh 2:1-8] until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks [the 49 years to rebuild the city of Jerusalem] and sixty-two weeks [434 years]; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.²⁶ Then after the sixty-two weeks [49 years + 434 years = 483 years] the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing [March 30, AD 33 = Triumphal entry into Jerusalem], and the people of the prince who is to come [i.e. Romans] will destroy the city and the sanctuary [August, AD 70]. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined [Josephus documented that 1,100,000 Jews were killed].²⁷ And he [he = the prince who is to come = Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [many = unbelieving Israel] for one week [seven years], but in the middle of the week [3 ½ years] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering [at the third Jewish temple, yet to be constructed]; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate [see Matt 24:15]. (Dan 9:24-27)

The present period from the day of Pentecost until the Rapture of the church is the time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth-seven. The seventieth-seven will be a time for the fulfillment of prophecy pertaining to Israel. The seven-year tribulation precedes the second coming of Jesus who is prophesied to set up His kingdom on earth (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4; 34-37; Dan 7:13-14; Luke 1:30-33; 22:28-30; Acts 1:3-6; Rev 20:4-6). The whole seven years is called a time of “tribulation” (Matt 24:9); however, the last three and half years are called the “great tribulation” (Matt 24:21; cf. Rev 7:14). Isaiah called it “the day of the Lord” (Isa 13:6-13; cf. Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20), and Jeremiah called

it “the time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer 30:7). The angel, Gabriel, revealed to Daniel that it will be “a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (Dan 12:1). The tribulation is the period in which God destroys the rebellion of: 1) Satan and his angels, 2) and unbelieving Israel and Gentiles. At the close of the tribulation, Satan will be defeated and bound for a thousand years (Rev 12:7-9; 20:1-3), the Antichrist and his false prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20), and all unbelievers are destroyed in judgment (Rev 19:19-21; cf. Matt 24:37-41), leaving only believing Jews and Gentiles to enter His kingdom on earth (Matt 25:31-46). In all the judgments, God is righteous and just, whereas men are wicked and “deserve” wrath (Rev 16:5-7; cf. 19:2). There is a dominant motif in all of Scripture which reveals “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5; cf. Jam 4:6). This is certainly true during the seven-year tribulation. God opposes those who:

1. Try to hide and flee from Him (Rev 6:15-16)
2. Seek death rather than conform to His will (Rev 9:6)
3. Do not repent of their rebellion (Rev 9:20-21)
4. Rejoice and celebrate at the death of His servants (Rev 11:7-10)
5. Side with the Satan (Rev 13:3-4)
6. Blaspheme and curse God’s name (Rev 16:8-9, 11, 21)
7. Make war with Jesus Christ (Rev 19:19)

God’s grace is witnessed toward:

1. The 144,000 Jews He saves and calls to service (Rev 7:4-8).
2. The many who have been saved during the tribulation (Rev 7:9-17).
3. His two prophetic witnesses whom He resurrects (Rev 11:11-12).
4. The nations to whom He sends His gospel message (Rev 14:6-7).
5. Those who enter into His kingdom after the Tribulation (Rev 20:4-6).

The seven-year tribulation is part of God’s future history upon the world. It is the time period in which He pours out judgment upon the world because of wickedness. In all His actions He is sovereign and just. According to His sovereignty, “our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psa 115:3; cf. 135:6), for “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). Of God’s judgments, the holy angels declare, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they [wicked unbelievers] poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it” (Rev 16:5-6). And the martyred saints agree, saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments” (Rev 16:7).

Making Sense of the World – Part 22

The Second Coming of Jesus

The coming of Messiah into the world is a prophesied event in the both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament revealed Messiah would come, both as a Suffering Servant (Psa 22:6, 12-18; Isa 50:6-7; 53:1-12; Dan 9:26; Zec 13:7), and as a reigning descendant of David, who will establish an earthly kingdom in Israel (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-5; Jer 23:5; Dan 2:44; 7:13-14). Jesus is the promised Messiah (Matt 1:1, 16; Luke 1:31-33; John 1:41-42). At His incarnation—nearly two thousand years ago—God the Son added humanity to Himself (John 1:1, 14), walked among men and lived a righteous life, free from sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5). At His first coming, Jesus repeatedly offered the earthly Davidic kingdom to Israel (Matt 4:17, 23; 9:35; 10:7), but His offer was rejected by the Jewish leadership and people (Matt 11:20; 12:14; 27:22-23; John 19:13-16), so the kingdom was postponed for a future time (Matt 21:43; cf. Matt 19:28; 25:31; Luke 22:28-30; Acts 1:3-6; Rev 20:4-6).

As the Suffering Servant, Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins (John 3:16; Rom 5:6-8; 1 Pet 3:18), was buried, and raised again on the third day (Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; Luke 24:6-7; Acts 10:38-41; 1 Cor 15:3-4). After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to numerous persons over a period of forty days, namely, Mary Magdalene and other women (Matt 28:1-10; John 20:10-18), two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), the disciples without Thomas (John 20:19-25), the disciples with Thomas (John 20:26-29), the disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23), Peter, James, and more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Cor 15:5-7), and lastly, to the disciples at the Mount of Olives, before He ascended bodily into heaven (Acts 1:9-12).

The Second Coming is distinguished from the rapture of the church when Christ takes all Christians to heaven (John 14:1-3). The rapture of the church occurs just prior to the seven-year Tribulation. We are informed “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th 4:16-17). After the rapture of the church, there will be a period of tribulation that will last seven years (Dan 9:24-27; Matt 24:9, 21; Rev 7:14). The Second Coming will happen after seven-year tribulation. The Gospel of Matthew records the words of Jesus concerning His coming in vivid detail (Matt 24:27-30). The apostle John recorded the Second Coming of Christ in the book of Revelation.

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it *is* called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war [as righteous Judge, Jesus declares guilt, and as Warrior, He executes punishment].¹² And His eyes *are* a flame of fire [signifying purity and anger], and upon His head

are many diadems [διάδημα *diadema* – a king’s crown]; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. ¹³ And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood [“dipped in blood” = signifying previous battle experience, i.e. the Flood, Sodom, Egypt, etc.]; and His name is called The Word of God [cf. John 1:1, 14]. ¹⁴ And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses [same as those described in vs. 8 = believers]. ¹⁵ And from His mouth comes a sharp sword [symbolizing the spoken word of God], so that with it He may smite the nations [God is militant; cf. Ex. 14:30-31; 15:3; Ps. 24:8]; and He will rule them with a rod of iron [Ps. 2:9]; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty [Isa. 63:1-6]. ¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” ¹⁷ And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God [“great supper of God” = a time when God consumes His enemies]; ¹⁸ in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” ¹⁹ And I saw the beast [Antichrist] and the kings of the earth [world rulers] and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army [cf. Rev. 16:12-14]. ²⁰ And the beast was seized [Antichrist], and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone [these are the first two persons cast into the lake of fire = eternal punishment]. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword [the spoken word] which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse [the Living Word], and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Rev 19:11-21)

After the tribulation, “when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne” (Matt 25:31). At that time Jesus will judge the nations of the world (Matt 25:32-46), “dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Th 1:8). And what will their punishment look like? Paul wrote, “These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed” (2 Th 1:9-10).

Making Sense of the Future – Part 23

The Millennial Kingdom

The Bible reveals two major aspects of God’s rule over His creation. The first is His universal rule in which He sovereignly decrees whatsoever comes to pass and “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11). There are times when God accomplishes His will immediately without the assistance of others (such as in the creation), and other times He chooses to work mediately through creatures, both intelligent (angels and people), and simple (Balaam’s donkey). Concerning God’s universal rule, Scripture reveals, “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all” (Psa 103:19), and “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psa 135:6). Daniel writes, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth” (Dan 4:34b-35a; cf. 5:21; 1 Ch 29:11-12).

The second is God’s earthly rule in which He governs through a theocratic administrator. The first account of such a rule is found in Genesis where the Lord assigned Adam and Eve to rule over the whole world (Gen 1:26-28). Theirs was a mediatorial rulership, which may be defined as “the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents the people before God; a rule which has special reference to the earth; and having as its mediatorial ruler one who is always a member of the human race.”⁴⁹ However, through an act of disobedience (Gen 3:1-7), Adam and Eve forfeited their rulership to Satan, a fallen angelic creature, who rules through deception (2 Cor 11:3, 14; Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8), blindness (2 Cor 4:3-4), and enslavement (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, Satan has had dominion over this world and is called “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), and “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). When tempting Jesus, Satan offered Him “the kingdoms of the world” (Matt 4:8-9), and they were his to give, saying, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). However, the Bible also reveals that Satan has been judged (Gen 3:15; John 16:11), and in the future will be cast out of heaven (Rev 12:7-9), confined for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3), and eventually cast into the Lake of Fire forever (Rev 20:10). It must always be remembered that God sovereignly permits Satan a limited form of rulership for a limited period of time, always restraining him and his demonic forces, if they seek to transgress the boundaries He’s established for them (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Mark 15:1-13; 2 Pet 2:4).

⁴⁹ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind. BMH Books, 2009), 41.

In spite of Satan's influence in the world, God is sovereignly directing history toward the establishment of a divinely appointed theocratic administrator who will rule on earth. The Lord focused specifically on David, promising that one of his descendants would rule forever (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-15). This descendant would be a righteous king (Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-18), and his kingdom will last forever (Dan 2:44; 7:13-14; 1 Cor. 15:24). Jesus is identified as that king (Luke 1:30-33). When Jesus came, He repeatedly offered the earthly kingdom to Israel (Matt 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:5-7), a literal kingdom that was future (Matt 6:10; Luke 19:11; Acts 1:3-6). But they rejected Him and His offer (Matt 11:20; 12:14; Mark 15:12-15; John 19:15); therefore, the earthly kingdom was postponed for a future time (Matt 21:43; cf. Matt 19:28; 25:31; Luke 22:28-30; Acts 1:3-6; Rev 20:4-6).

We are currently living in the church age, which will come to an end when the church is raptured to heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Afterward, there will be a period of time known as the Tribulation, which will begin when the Antichrist signs a seven-year peace treaty with Israel (Dan 9:24-27). The time of Tribulation will come to an end when Jesus returns to earth to put down rebellion (Rev 19:11-21) and establish His millennial kingdom (Matt 25:31; Rev 11:15; 20:1-6). The word *millennium* is derived from the Latin words *mille* which means "thousand" and *annum* which means "year". The word *millennium* translates the Greek word *χίλιοι* *chilioi*, which occurs six times in Revelation 20:2-7. After His second coming, Jesus will rule the whole earth, from Jerusalem, on the throne of David (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Luke 1:30-33; cf. Mark 11:9-10), He will rule absolutely with "a rod of iron" (Psa 2:9; Rev 19:15), and afterward His kingdom will become an eternal kingdom (Dan 2:44; 7:27; 1 Cor. 15:24). King David himself will be resurrected to rule with Christ (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23-24). Jesus will rule the nations in righteousness, advocating for the poor and weak, as well as suppressing wickedness and rebellion (Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-18). People will have good health (Isa 35:5-6), live long lives, and experience improvements in social and economic life (Isa 65:19-25; Amos 9:13-14), and a new worship system will be implemented (see Ezekiel chapters 40-46). There will be no more war (Isa 2:2-4; 32:17-18; Mic 4:1-4), and harmful animals will no longer be a threat (Isa 11:6-9; Ezek 34:25). Israel will possess all the Promised Land (Ezek 36:24; 39:25-29; Amos 9:15; cf. Gen 15:18-21), and will be exalted over the Gentiles (Isa 14:1-2; 49:22-23; 60:14-17; 61:6-7). The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord (Isa 11:9; Jer 31:33-34), and the Holy Spirit will indwell all believers (Ezek 36:27; 37:14; cf. Jer 31:33). The Gentiles will participate in the Jewish feasts and sacrificial system (Zec 14:16). Satan will be bound during the reign of Christ (Rev 20:1-3), but sadly, this will not change his rebellious nature, or the nature of those who follow him (Rev 20:7-10).

The Eternal State

After the millennial kingdom, God will create a “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). The apostle John said, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea” (Rev 21:1). This will be a time when there is no sin, sickness, or death. All will be perfect and peaceful. I will address this subject in future lessons.