The Betrayal of the Church: Understanding

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The world will hear when the people speak.

Foreword

The message of this work is not bound by walls or denominations, nor offered for gain. It is given freely to every soul who seeks light in the midst of confusion. What you hold in your hands is not a new teaching, but a call to remember, to see what was written from the beginning- scripture, and to hear what has long been spoken yet seldom *understood*.

The world has turned its face from wisdom, mistaking ritual for faith and comfort for truth. But the voice of *understanding* calls again. It asks the reader to see, not through doctrine, but through the Spirit, that the Word of God may be known as it was meant to be known. The Word, which is both Christ and divine truth.

Take these words and share them freely. Let them travel where the light of truth is dim, the place where confusion darkens the spirit. Do not add to them, nor take away, but carry them as they are given, for they are not mine alone, but belong to all who seek.

The time has come to awaken. The time has come to understand.

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To all who call on the name of God, and to all who seek the *understanding* of the truth of the Word,

The end as the beginning

How does the story of the Bible end? That is the question, isn't it? When we read the Bible, the written texts which have been chosen for us to read end with the beginnings of the Christian church and the outreach they initiated. And since then, the church has flourished! Its outreach has put the word of God in every corner of this world. Or has it? What if the church has betrayed the truth it was built on?

The last writing in the traditional Bible is the book of Revelation written by the apostle John while he was in exile on Patmos. Many have disregarded this writing as being the ramblings of a mad man. Others have tried to understand its meaning, but their studies led to nothing. It is presented to us as the Revelation of Christ Jesus. And it gives us a haunting outlook on the future of the church, the truth of which we can see clearly today when we question the hypocrisies surrounding the church. The beginning of the book of Revelation contains John's letters to the seven churches in Asia (the Asia of that time) as Jesus dictated to him. However, the message of those letters was not intended for the people of that time as much as it was intended for all people for all time to come.

The first message was to the church in Ephesus. In it we are told how the church has forsaken their first love. In other words, they had lost their original purpose.

Then the church in Smyrna where people were pretending to be Jews even though they weren't. In other words, evil was sneaking in among them pretending to be righteous.

Then the church in Pergamum where the people were following the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. In other words, they were letting outside influence change their message.

Then the church in Thyatira where the people were tolerating Jezebel. In other words, immoral behavior was being allowed.

Then the church in Sardis where they were told to “Wake up!” because their deeds were not found to be complete. In other words, the people became complacent.

Then the church in Philadelphia where the people are found to be in good standing but are weary from their endurance. In other words, the church was well established there but was weakening from weariness.

Finally, the church in Laodicea where the people are not hot or cold but lukewarm, they think they are rich and well off. In other words, they are mistaken because the riches they have are physical in nature rather than the riches of the spirit.

When we have understanding, we can know this message was not only to the churches of that time, but to our church history today. The church did forget their beginnings. It has allowed evil to sneak into it. It has allowed outside influence to change its message. It has allowed immoral behavior. It has become complacent. It has also been in good standing, well established, as it has reached the ends of the Earth, yet has grown weary in the process. It has lastly become prideful, thinking it has riches, but it is mistaken as to the riches which matter. We can see how each letter mirrors a stage in the church’s journey through history.

Therefore, those letters should still speak to us in our time. Yes, the time has come for understanding! The time has come to call out the Christian Church of all branches! What are you doing? Repent and do the things you did at first! Do not fear the synagogue of Satan! Be faithful even to the point of death! Repent and remove the outside influences! Repent of Jezebel’s ways! Wake up! Strengthen what is about to die! Hold on to what you have in the patient endurance! Buy from Jesus the gold refined in the fire and white clothes to wear! You of all people know the meaning of these things and you of all people know the truth in these words.

The traditional Bible ends there (after the rest of the revelation of Jesus). With the Christian Church attempting to begin a movement but already showing its humility and its destined disgrace. But as we just discovered the story of the Bible does not end there. The church continues up to today and then some. We need to consider the actions of the generations passed. In order to reach a full understanding of where we are

now, how the story has continued, and where the story will go, we need to start at the beginning and reach our understanding.

The message is not as simple as it seems. Jesus spoke in parables; God sends His message in the ultimate parable. The parable of the Earth, the unfolding of creation as divine teaching, one we *must* understand.

The beginning

When we look at the sky as a storm is approaching, we see the clouds hanging in the air above us. We can sometimes see the sheet of rain as it falls from the clouds. How often have we looked on in wonder of how beautiful and powerful a storm can be? That feeling of wonder is deeper than we are able to express in words. Although it feels natural, it is the stirring of the spirit. The thunder booms shaking even the ground beneath our feet. The lightning crashes with fire and destruction. We begin to feel differently inside of ourselves. In search of the source of that wonder, consider what causes the rain?

We know rain comes from the clouds which form from the evaporation of the water to a vapor state where it combines with dust particles in the air and becomes a cloud. When it is heavy enough, it falls because of gravity. What causes gravity? The rotation of the Earth. What causes the rotation of the Earth? The rotation of the galaxy. What causes the rotation of the galaxy? The rotation and movement of the universe. What causes the rotation and movement of the universe? Despite theories, there is no answer to this in our science.

Perhaps we should try another way. What causes the evaporation? Heat applied to the Earth's waters. Where does the heat come from? The sun's rays. Where do the sun's rays come from? The sun. Where did the sun come from? Dust and gas gathered together and compressed to form it. Where did the dust and gas come from? The explosion we call the "big bang theory" stating the universe quickly expanded from a major explosion. Then, where did the so called "big bang" come from? There is no answer to this in our science. This is where human reasoning ends, the point where understanding *must* yield to faith.

Therefore, the source of that feeling of wonder comes from God. This is a simplified typical Christian response and yet our science has supported this response in every way. We have the most incredible technology available to us even so much as to venture above our skies and enter the realm of outer space. "We just aren't there yet." we say. "We will discover the science of these things over time." we say. When we have the answers to our beginning, then we will be able to create new beginnings. Until then, we just keep repeating our past. The thunder we hear is the voice of God strong enough to shake even the ground beneath our feet. The lightning we see is God's truth

moving at fast speeds with fire and destruction. That sounds terrible, but it is true. Consider the symbolism of God's power manifested in nature. The time has come for our understanding.

In the beginning there was God. Imagine God at this point however you want. There He was pondering, considering all things. As He did, He first created wisdom as stated in the book of Proverbs. "The Lord brought me forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old;". Wisdom was with Him as He worked through the creation of all things. Wisdom came first! Wisdom is the combination of knowledge, experience, understanding, and insight. The book of Genesis tells us that God created the Earth. It talks about all the physical nature He created, the waters, the air, the land masses, the animals, the plants, the people. It is important in our understanding to know that just as God created wisdom, He also created the other metaphysical things such as counsel, might, or fear in addition to the physical things. Furthermore, there is wisdom inherent in our physical nature because it was with God while the creation of all things took place. Thus, the answer to our questions about the beginnings of things can be found through wisdom which stems from our *understanding*. The unity of the physical and metaphysical through creation enlightens us to God's purpose in creation when we understand in full.

The book of Genesis tells us that God created the Earth and everything on it in seven days. In our understanding we must know that a day to God can be an hour, an hour can be a year, and a day can be a thousand years. What do we know about time? It is based on the rotation of the Earth. Again, do we need to go back and do the same exercise? This too comes from God. Does He not then exist outside of our understanding of time? As the apostle Peter later tells us, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."

The first day God created light and separated it from darkness this was the first day. Understand a day consists of light and darkness. Then on the second day God separated the waters and called it the sky. On the third day He pooled the water and made the dry ground appear, making land and seas. Also on this day, He brought about vegetation of all kinds. On the fourth day He created the sun and moon to be light during both the day and the night. In other words, it was on this day the universe

as we know it came to be. Interesting how God created the Earth first followed by the universe. This is important in our understanding. It does not matter if it goes against our science. Our science does not have the answers to these things aside from theory and assumption. On the fifth day the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air were created. On the sixth day the creatures of the land were created, all animals, bugs, snakes, reptiles, mammals, and livestock. Also on this day, God created mankind in His image to rule over all the creatures of the Earth. Then His work was finished and on the seventh day He rested.

This is a story most of us have heard many times over the course of our lives. However, there is always misunderstanding and now is not the time for that. Seven days means nothing to us as it relates to our concept of time. Our accounting of time is meaningless as it relates to creation, however the order of things is important. The light and dark were created on the first day, there is more to light and dark than our simple understanding of day and night or light switch on versus light switch off. Think of the metaphysical. Think of the things beyond our physical nature that are either light or dark. Good versus evil, giving versus greed, fear versus comfort, etcetera. These spiritual symbols are embedded in the order of creation. Then the sky on the second day and the separation of the water from the sky, there must be a habitat to prepare. Then the dry land and vegetation make the habitat hospitable on the third day. The vegetation was the intended food for all things living on the Earth. The vegetation, not the animals! As we stated, the Earth was formed by our creator before the universe which was created on the fourth day. This also provided a cycle that would repeat itself and that cycle of things is important to our understanding. A habitat does best with living things in it that will help to clean it, so God created the birds and the sea creatures on the fifth day with their purpose of cleaning the Earth.

For those of us who question how dinosaurs are not included in the creation story, consider that this is the point in which they were created, remembering that our concept of time does not apply here. But they too had a purpose in all of this. Do you think fossil fuels were an accident, a coincidence? Or do you think they were put there intentionally for us to find and do what we have done with? Everything is done for a reason. Why not include it in the original text? Think of the audience, do you think they would have believed it then? Yet how easy is it in our time to believe dinosaurs existed? A time for everything, now is the time for understanding!

The rest of the land creatures and man were created on the last day of work meaning that the work was done for us, we were the last addition to the creation, right? Like readying a habitat at a zoo before you put an animal in it. It is prepared specifically for that creature. But that is not true, it was made for us, but we are part of it, therefore there is more to the purpose. This habitat was not only for us. It is so much more. We are part of the habitat just like the sea or the land or the animals. Creation, then, is not a stage for humanity. It is rather, a living unity which we are intended to maintain and uphold. We need to understand. Lastly God did not rest until His work was done on the seventh day. This will help our understanding.

Why, church leaders? Why have you not taught in this way? Is it because you did not understand these things or because you didn't think people could accept the truth? Go back to the beginning and do what you did at first! And you, readers, will you seek to understand?

After the Earth was created but before there was vegetation on it, God created one man named Adam. We should pause here and discuss a topic of much turmoil. We have heard many express their frustration with God's portrayal as a male figure. God, the Father, gave life. Earth, the Mother, bore that life and tended to it. Physical gender isn't the *understanding* we need to reach. It is the simple idea that God is our Father- our creator who gave us life, and the Earth is our Mother- our bearer, our provider. God is referred to in this writing as "He" following this very understanding. Stop fighting over physical gender. Although the Earth was not finished yet and the vegetation hadn't come up yet, God had created a garden for Adam to live in. The garden represents more than just a physical place; it is the perfect balance, providing everything we need. The garden was full of the best vegetation, providing him with everything he could possibly need to live. Included in that were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

As the rest of the creation occurred, the animals were brought to Adam for him to name them and to see if they would be a suitable helper for him. They were not, so God took one of Adam's ribs and formed a woman from it and her name was Eve. This is important to our understanding. Since woman came from man, men would only be able to come from women from then on. Thus, building a mutual reliance on each other. This is why men would grow up and leave their parents to become one with

their wife. Adam was not able to handle everything on his own and needed a helper. Women are here to not only help, but in God's great wisdom they have influence and balance over men. When taken as a wife a woman takes the place of a man's parents in his life and provides him with comfort, support, instruction, and serves as an outlet for them. Husbands, you will do well to heed these words and return the same grace to your wives. Honor your mother and father through the treatment of your wife! Wives, know the impact you have on your husbands, guide them with righteousness and support them with God's grace. Adam and Eve had everything they needed to live. The vegetation provided more than enough for them. They were perfect in every way until one day.

They were allowed to eat anything from the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could even eat from the tree of life giving them immortality. One day as Eve was sitting around and Adam was near her, a snake approached her and asked her if it was true God told them they could not eat from any of the plants in the garden. Eve, in turn, told the snake that they were only told not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they would die. To which the serpent replied by saying they would not die, but instead they would be like God with the knowledge of good and evil. This sounded good to Eve and so she took some of the fruit and ate it and gave some to Adam and he ate it as well. This serpent, more than an animal, symbolizes the voice of inner temptation. Church leaders, why do you teach that the snake caused this sin? We do this regarding many things, always blaming someone else for our misconduct. The truth is the serpent simply told Eve the fruit would enlighten her and made it tempting to her. She wanted it. She desired it. She offered it to Adam, and he wanted it. He desired it. All three were to blame if you still believe blame is to be had, however we should understand otherwise. The snake drew attention to the temptation and both Adam and Eve gave in to that temptation. The serpent approached Eve because it knew she had power over the man. How did it know this? Eve gave in to desire and so did Adam. Again, all three were to blame, but consider God has done all things. Where did the serpent come from? Do we think it snuck into God's ranks? Did it defect from the good creation of its own accord? Understand, this is not to deny the serpent's reality but to uncover its divine purpose as part of God's teaching.

Understand the tree. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge is required to discern with wisdom. How easy it is for us to say Eve was wrong for believing the serpent. However, without the knowledge of good and evil, wouldn't any of us have believed the serpent and eaten the fruit? Don't we honestly do this on a daily basis? We look and say, "That sounds good, I'll try that." Without having applied knowledge first in order to discern the moral choice. Eve did not have that knowledge. In other words, her act was not rebellion born of malice but of untested innocence. The church also teaches that this is a story made up in fantasy to explain things. Few other biblical texts are considered to be fabricated other than this one. Why do you deny? Understand Adam was created on the third day before man was, but Adam was in the garden while mankind was created on the sixth day. We are not told what day Adam and Eve ate the fruit. We also know they had access to the tree of life and therefore were not held to the confines of death. The timing of these things is not what is important. What does matter is the knowledge and understanding that these two were made special from the rest by God. These two had the knowledge of good and evil while the rest of mankind walked blindly to these things. The distinction between those who have awakened to understanding and those who walk without it reveals a pattern which continues through the rest of Scripture.

Is it so hard to believe that God sent the serpent to test them? It represents that little voice inside your head telling you it's ok to do something. We are all allowed to act and learn as long as we learn the knowledge of good and evil from it and apply it to our lives. This is our test. This is part of our mission. Understand the knowledge of good and evil, use it to discern with wisdom. This has always been a necessary process for any of God's chosen people which as you will learn, all of us are. We must all eat the fruit and face the repercussions. Now who is to blame? Do we dare to blame God for this, or do we admit there is no blame to have and in our truth and understanding thank God for giving us the opportunity to learn and to be like Him as the serpent who was sent by God promised? This is not to say that the serpent was righteous, but that even through temptation, God's purpose works toward our growth. Consider the desire which the serpent awakened them to, it can be stated as the very desire which brings about new life. A desire God wanted us to have from the start. The sin of Adam and Eve. Since that desire is necessary to bring about new life, we can understand God placed this challenge in front of us. To desire life, and only life. We should not desire

for selfish gain; our desire is intended to be for God's purpose- the creation and preservation of life.

Right after eating the fruit Adam and Eve both had their eyes opened to shame. They knew they were wrong to eat it. God had given them the most amazing place to live, and they disobeyed the only rule they had. Just as soon as they realized their shame God enters the garden looking for them. But understand this is God's mercy, not wrath. God's first act after sin is to seek the sinner. Isn't it true that if we set an action in motion, we will check to see its outcome. God finds them in their shame and delivers His punishment to them. How often have we eaten the fruit we were not supposed to and then hid ourselves in our shame? We do not know what test the Lord will give us or when, or of the many tests, which time He will arrive just after, looking for us.

God punished the snake telling him that because of what he did, he will always crawl on his belly, he would forever be hostile toward people and people toward him. Understand this. The snake although sent by God is the symbol of that little voice inside our heads telling us it is ok to do something. Is that voice not one that sneaks around, is it not one we battle with, both it biting us and us stomping on it in frustration? This is the evil outside influence inherent in our physical existence. God allowed it here for us to contend with as part of the test of discernment.

To the woman, Eve, God gives the punishment that she will forever bear the now increased pain of childbirth, and her desire would be for her husband, and he would rule over her. This ruling over intends to say there would now be struggle and imbalance between them. Understand, the woman is meant to give help and direction to the man, she was the one who gave him the fruit, therefore what he gives her will cause her pain. Meaning childbirth. Her desire will be for her husband, and he will rule over her, meaning what she wants to be a pleasant thing for her will be a struggle.

To the man, Adam, God says that the man will, from now on, need to work hard in order to get his food all the days of his life. Up to that point the man was able to eat whatever the garden supplied but from now on he would have to work to rid the land of thorns and brush and would have to work it constantly in order to have food to eat. Meaning with the knowledge of good and evil his tasks in life would now be that much

more difficult. Understand the difference between having your food handed to you and having to cultivate the ground and grow it from seed yourself in order to eat it. What a difference! This too goes hand in hand with the woman's punishment. She has a desire for her husband but cannot have him since he is busy toiling to provide the food for them. And both of their punishments go hand in hand with the punishment dealt to the snake, that if they act as the snake, they too would be embattled making both of their suffering worse. Thus, the three- man, woman, and serpent- now live intertwined in struggle, each revealing the cost of knowledge.

But that was not all. Now that God saw the man and woman had the knowledge of good and evil, they would no longer be allowed access to the garden or the tree of life. So now their time was limited. Understand that with the knowledge of good and evil comes the knowledge of life and death. But the tree of life was not destroyed. It was placed with cherubim and a flaming sword guarding it on the east side (this is important later; East, the place of sunrise, represents for us both exile and new beginning). Understand they were now cast out of the garden and sent to live among the other people God had created on the Earth. Do we not see what we need to do in order to gain access to both the garden and the tree of life? We need to avoid the advice of the serpent, we need to endure our pains, we need to walk humbly under authority, we need to work hard every day to feed our spirits, and lastly, having the knowledge of good and evil, we need to face death with understanding, wisdom, and purity of spirit.

The story continues. God's chosen people Adam and Eve had children named Cain and Abel. Cain worked on the vegetation from the ground and Abel worked on the livestock. When they were bringing a sacrifice to God, Cain brought some of the fruit of the ground and Abel brought some of the fat from the first born of his livestock. In our understanding we must remember the fruit from the garden. They had everything they needed to live on, yet they chose to take more. It is enough to have everything we need. Excess is not important! Although Cain brought an offering, it was just some of the fruit from the ground, not the choicest fruit from the vine. Abel brought the best he had. He understood he still had everything he needed and was content whereas Cain kept the best for himself despite having everything he needed. Understand what an offering is, the outward sign of what the heart gives. What matters is not the thing itself, but the spirit behind it. Therefore, God was more pleased with Abel's sacrifice

then He was with Cain's, and He let them know. This caused Cain to be upset. God asks Cain why he is upset and reminds him that if you do what is right you will be accepted but if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door, and you must master it. This is the first time sin is mentioned in the Bible and God did not condemn Cain at this time. Here again, we see the serpent's whisper, not outside but within the heart. Cain's sin exceeded the sin of Adam and Eve. Cain's anger toward his brother was not swayed and he lashed out against his brother Abel, and he killed him in cold blood. And just like the garden, God comes to Cain right as his shame sets in. Cain tried to hide what he did from the Lord, the first murder but more so the first denial of responsibility for another soul. But God knows all and was not fooled.

God punishes Cain by forcing him to be a wanderer in the land with no success in growing crops. To which Cain objected stating that if he is forced to be a wanderer he will be killed. God in turn said that if anyone kills him, they will suffer vengeance seven times over. This mark as it has been called was not a curse but a symbol that vengeance belongs to God alone. So, Cain left and moved to another area. We must understand God's judgment here. If a person in our lives lacks the ability to discern right and wrong as God told Cain was his error in the sacrifice, we should correct and tolerate them as God did. But if they continue to do wrong like Cain did by killing his brother, we should remove them from our lives. Vengeance, which God certainly could have taken on Cain, is not the correct judgment for us. Additionally, if we are part of God's chosen people (which we all are now), no one is allowed to kill us for it without facing a penalty of vengeance seven times over again. This is to show that vengeance is God's to take on man, not man to take on himself.

Now Cain, living in another region, marries and has children. He begins building a city. His offspring, his family line, were the ones who started living in tents and tending to the livestock, playing the harp and flute, and forging tools of bronze and iron. Think of this as it relates to the advancement of mankind. This group of people that began as part of God's chosen people were now building the platform for technologies to come. Yet in their growth, wisdom diminished. Do you not understand that this too came from God? God had planned this to happen from the creation of all things. Do you not think God could have accepted Cain's offering without pointing out to him what was wrong with it? Do you not think God knew what would occur from His scolding of Cain? He went to Cain right after Abel was killed. God also protected Cain when

He cast him out. Do you think God erred? Christian church, how do you teach this as nothing more than Abel was good and Cain was bad? Or you teach it as "Thou shalt not kill". Do you still not see? Discern the truth in this. Both Cain and Abel were descendants of God's chosen ones, and they show us that just because we are part of God's chosen people, that does not make us immune to error. We are shown correction, if we don't change, we are cast out, yet even still we will be protected by God who wants for us to do good during our time here. There is hope even in our shame!

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son whose name was Seth. And Seth had a son named Enosh and it was at that time men started calling on the name of God. Understand this, there were those living outside of the garden. These are the men who at that time started calling on the name of God. Clearly Adam and Eve, Seth, and Enosh were spreading the news about God. The Bible gives us a genealogy from Adam to Noah listing each generation in their family, the number of years they lived and who their children were. The number of years they lived ranged from a few hundred up to over nine hundred. Most people say this is another fantasy story written into the Bible to be symbolic. We scoff at this and say, "No one lives that long, it must be made up fantasy." Or we say, "The people of that time calculated years differently." But we are wrong. This was part of the creation. They did live that long! How glorious was their patient endurance! Here is your dispute. The book of Genesis was written by Moses. How is that possible when Moses wasn't there? Moses received the words for the text from God. Moses lived in a time when years were tracked very similarly to the way we do today. He did not misunderstand what God had him write! Do we think God who created all things could not allow man to live that many years? Do we think our bodies were not capable of lasting longer then? Where is our faith? Where is our belief without proof. When the proof comes to us, will we deny it then too? When we stand in judgement will we say "But I mean nine hundred years? Ha!"? Then ask yourself what difference this makes to our understanding. This faith is another part of our test.

Here is a moment of understanding. We now have three groups of people on Earth. We have those who were created outside of the garden, those who were in the family line of Cain, and those who were in the family line of Adam. The family line of both Cain and Adam were God's chosen people. As God's sons saw the number of people increase, they were attracted to the daughters of men. They married any of them they wanted. Just like the snake which brought outside influence on Eve's mind, the

daughters of the people corrupted God's sons. In response to this, God stated that He would not contend with man forever and reduced the number of years they would live to be one-hundred twenty. Do we need to do the same exercise again? It is also stated that as the sons of God had children with the women of man, their offspring were the champions of old. But God also saw how wicked everyone was becoming, and He regretted putting man on the Earth. Have you ever tried doing something and reached a point when you feel you should just start over? Again, should we think God erred? Everything has a purpose. God, although He had regret for creating man, He still held on to His plan. He still had hope. He did not start over, but He adjusted as we all must from time to time in order to accomplish our goals. Think of this not as God changing His mind, rather expressing sorrow that His creation had turned from its intended understanding. God's plan is the ultimate mystery, yet the answer has been in front of us all along.

A new beginning

There was one man, Noah, who was descended from the family line of Adam and Seth. Noah was a righteous man who had no fault in him from those around him. He was an upright man. God decided He would wipe the Earth clean of the violence and debauchery that had grown in the heart of every person and every living creature on it, except Noah and his family. Being the only man God found worthy, He warned Noah that He was going to send a flood to destroy all people and every living thing on the Earth, and He instructed Noah to build a huge ship called an ark and to place pairs of all the animals in it according to His instruction. Those animals along with Noah and his family would be spared from the flood, thereby preserving life. The ark, then, is not merely a vessel but a symbol of preserved *understanding* amidst chaos. There are those who claim the story of the flood to also be a fictional tale. Yet science continues moving in the direction of proving this flood took place. Geologists around the world are beginning to reach an understanding of how the layers of rock we find were deposited not in slow progression but rather in fast settling, pooling fossils into groups along waterways. Tales of the great flood span many cultures. There is, at the time of this writing, more proof this flood actually occurred than there is to dispute it. Find faith!

Noah did as God asked and built the ark, gathered the animals, the supplies needed, and his family, and when the day came, they loaded the ark, and the rains poured down covering the whole Earth and killing every living creature on the land and in the air. After the rain stopped and the water receded Noah and his family were able to leave the ark and be on the land again. After stepping off the ark, Noah took some animals and sacrificed them to God. Think of that, every living thing on the Earth was just destroyed but Noah had everything he needed and then some still. He was willing to sacrifice even a few of the animals in thanks to the Lord for saving him and his family. In so doing, he demonstrated repentance for Cain's actions. True repentance requires change. This was pleasing to the Lord and therefore God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants for all time.

God says that He will never again curse the ground because of man even though every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood. He tells them that the fear and dread of mankind will now be on every living thing on the Earth. They will all be food for us now, not just the vegetation. But He warns not to eat meat that still has its

lifeblood in it. And He warns that for our lifeblood He will demand an accounting. And not only that but each living creature, and each man will be held accountable for their fellow man. In other words, God has now reduced the years mankind will live and has tasked mankind with taking care of not only themselves, but each other and all living things! Do we do this? Do we account for all our actions, and for our treatment of each other and of all God's creation? God is going to hold us each accountable. We must understand God has given permission now to eat the animals, yet the vegetation was still enough. Consider why this was done, the preservation of life through the sacrifice of life. Everything for a purpose. In the same message God tells us that we will be held accountable as will the animals for our treatment of each other. In our time where do we include the animals in our treatment of each other? In the same message God tells us the animals will all fear us. Doesn't this mean the animals do have feelings as we have so often contested? The test remains, even though we can, should we? Church leaders, why do you teach this message as only God saying He will never destroy the Earth again, as if it is some beautiful tale? This is a story full of violence and destruction with only a glimmer of hope! But the message that must be taught is the truth. When did you lose the meaning of this? Every person's heart is evil from childhood! We will all be held accountable. What are you afraid of? Have you lost your faith so much that you are now afraid to teach the true message? Do you fear men, or do you fear your accounting?

God tells them to multiply and fill the Earth. Understand, Noah had with him his three sons, their wives, and his wife. We are not all the product of incest as some of you say! We do not know all the details of who had children with who, but we know well enough to say that a group of people under the direction of God, following God's command were able to repopulate the Earth. How do we repopulate our livestock? Again, where is our faith? Furthermore, we say that this story does not explain or give us clarity regarding the different nationalities we have. Why? What nationality were the wives of them? Is it so hard to believe that they came from different races of people that God had created on the Earth, or that those races came to be over thousands of years afterward? Where do we think God's power ends? What do we think is not possible from God? He will show us that it is. Find faith!

God tells them His rainbow will be the covenant between Him and all life from then on to the end of the Earth that He will never again wash all life from the face of

the Earth. This is the first covenant and the first ark. It is not a beautiful promise but rather it is a covenant with God that we should not break. It is a warning and a teaching. A covenant is a sacred promise between God and humankind; the rainbow, a sign that destruction will not be the final word. Although a rainbow is beautiful and gives comfort, it carries with it the fear of the lord as the storm rumbles near it! The ark protected all life from destruction. This story shows a cleansing of the Earth. It is not just a flood of physical water, but the washing away of corrupt spirit. The water represents renewal; this same element continues in this way later as we learn about baptism and rebirth.

Noah's sons did as God asked, they had many children. These would be the people that would eventually spread out over the whole Earth. Find faith! One day Noah drank some wine and passed out naked. Nakedness is used to symbolize exposure. Thus, Noah's drunkenness mirrors Adam's awakening. Both moments show how knowledge without wisdom exposes us. When one of his sons found him, he ran out to tell his brothers. Imagine when we see someone passed out, drunk and naked, and we bring others in to joke and ridicule. This was not how Noah had raised his sons. His other two sons, after hearing about it, brought a cloth in and respectfully covered him. Noah after hearing about it, called a curse down on the family line of the son who wanted to mock and ridicule him, Canaan. This story shows us how even after cleansing, sin returns quickly. The cycle of ignorance and understanding continues. This is important in our understanding as, over the course of the whole story of the Bible, people are always split in one way or another. With a group who do right and live in God's ways, and those who do not. In this new beginning of life on Earth, just as it was with the creation, there was division between those who follow God's commands and those who don't know it and don't follow it. Regardless, his sons had many children, and the population grew.

Building of society

The people all spoke the same language and were starting to use bricks instead of stone (another technology coming into being). The people planned to build a tower that reached to the heavens so they could make a name for themselves. They were contesting God. However, this is not our purpose. We are not here to make a name for ourselves. We are not here to contend with God, that is not His intent or our purpose. God decided that in order to accomplish His goal, He needed to humble us. He decided that since they all spoke the same language and understood each other, if He confused their language and they no longer understood each other, then His intent would be better served. Their tongues were divided because their hearts ceased to understand. This is another adjustment being made to ensure His creation would serve its purpose, and another test for us. It worked and the people were spread over the whole Earth speaking many different languages. It is hard to accomplish anything when we don't understand each other. Understand!

We now have the ability to interpret anything from any language. We simply need to get a translator to help. What now, do you contest with God again? Or is the meaning of this more than just the languages we speak and rather refers to whether or not we say what we mean? It seems there are new words and new ways of communication constantly. Yet none of us understand each other from a mother and son to a husband and wife to the leaders of different countries, none of us are able to consistently say what we mean or to hear what the others are saying. Open your ears and hear what matters! Don't contend with God by building your own towers! Instead put your collective efforts into building up God's temple! Again, church leaders, why do you present this story about the tower of Babel as if it was the creation of language and that alone. That is not the message! Say what you mean and mean what you say. Control your tongues. Be clear and concise with your communication so that the people can understand and come together and build up God's name, not yours! Understanding cannot be found through pride. And so, the story turns again, understanding lost, waiting to be restored.

The Bible continues with the genealogy of Noah's son Shem and continues through to Abram. Many hundreds of years have now passed since the flood. God told Abram to leave his family's land and to move to a different place. Abram did, bringing along his wife and his grandson Lot. They moved through the land and God told Abram

which area of the land He was going to give to Abram's descendants. But Abram had to continue moving due to a famine and ended up living in Egypt for a while where he gained much wealth and livestock. He then returned to the land and Lot with him. Since they had so much between the two of them, they split up. Abram went to the land of Canaan. Remember this is the land which Noah called a curse on. God has promised it to His chosen people. Understand, that which belongs to the unworthy is given to the worthy! This too was part of God's great mystery and plan. Lot chose to go the opposite direction and made his home in the plains where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were. After some time, Lot is taken captive, and Abram has to go with his troops to defeat the enemy kings and save the people who were taken captive, including Lot. He is victorious and when he is offered the spoils from the battle Abram refuses them and goes home humbly.

Now Abram and his wife Sarai want to have a child because they are growing old and have none. So, Sarai gives one of her servants, Hagar, to Abram as a wife to have a child for him. They do and tension grows between Sarai and Hagar. Sarai tells Abram to send Hagar away and he does, but God tells her to return and to submit to Sarai because Ishmael (which means God hears), the son of Abram and Hagar would have many descendants who would behave like wild donkeys (which at that time were desired by hunters as good game and were known for being wild in their actions) and they would become twelve tribes and live in hostility toward all their brothers. This is important in our understanding. Hagar did return and submitted herself to Sarai.

Then God went to Abram and told him he would have a son with Sarai who would in turn be the father of many nations and changed Abram's name to be Abraham (which means father of many). Here begins the covenant, the binding relationship of faith between God and humankind. God then makes a covenant with Abraham that He will be the God of Abraham's people for all time to come but they must keep their covenant and be circumcised. God states it is a covenant of the flesh. Therefore, this covenant has an ark of the flesh. It is important to understand the meaning of this. Jesus of course tells us later that this is no longer necessary. But we need to understand God's discernment at this time. Why do we circumcise our young boys in our time? Current medical experts tell us it is for the wellbeing of the child. They say a young man will suffer less infections if they are circumcised. There is truth to this since bacteria could remain under the extra skin and cause infection to occur. Imagine in

those days how much more of an issue this would have been knowing that they did not have the resources to keep their bodies clean as we do today. But even today we are mistaken about circumcision. Yes, it helps keep infections away, but at the same time it causes other issues over the course of a man's life. It reduces the sensitivity of the region by exposing it to more constant friction. This can cause men to desire more vigorous sexual acts to make up for the loss of sensitivity. Some are deformed from the process. Some even lose their penis from it. Could we not today simply clean our male children better? Regardless, cleanliness seems to be the only reason this is done in modern times. Jesus later explains this to us in more detail, but to enlighten us to *understanding* here it is stated plainly. The covenant of the flesh being circumcision is representative of two things which correlate as- cleanliness by removing the excess from our lives. This is the message Abraham was given. To live clean by removing the excess from our lives and that is how we will know who God's people are. Are there any today?

God also tells Abraham who is now almost a hundred years old, that his wife Sarai who is also almost a hundred years old, will change her name to Sarah and will bear him a child. The child's name will be Isaac and God will make a covenant with him, and he will have many descendants. To which Abraham says that he wishes he and Hagar's son Ishmael would live under God's blessing as well. God says that he will, and many nations will come from him, but it will be with Isaac that God makes His covenant. This is important later. We should note here, that Abraham did not doubt God in any of this. It was his faith, not his actions which made him righteous before God. Righteous meaning, right standing, in harmony with God.

And so, Abraham did. He had all the men and boys within his household (this would be everyone living in his land, servants, members of the immediate family, relatives of them, and so on) circumcised including his son Ishmael.

As the story continues, a couple of God's messengers come to tell Sarah about the child she will have and as they are leaving, Abraham walks with them for a while. Then God questions whether or not He should tell Abraham what is about to happen. He decides to tell him and lets Abraham know that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have been reported as becoming so wicked they cannot be saved so God is going to see if that is true. Abraham pleads with God asking if there are some in the city that are

righteous, will He still destroy it? To which God says even if there are ten people who are righteous, He will save them. This is important in our *understanding*. God knew Abraham would be a great leader and that his descendants would as well. He knew the plan all along. So why would He question whether to tell Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah or not? It is part of the test. Would we have responded in the same way Abraham did questioning God's judgment, pleading with Him to save the righteous? It's easy to say yes. But, in the moment would any of us be so confident in our faith to speak this way to God? The righteous are rewarded.

The angels of the Lord go to Sodom and just happen to be met by Lot on their way in. Lot convinces them to stay at his house, and the men of the city come to the house and demand that Lot give them the two men who were visiting so they can have sex with them. Lot refuses and the angels of the Lord make the men of the city go blind so they can't keep trying to enter the house. The angels tell Lot to gather his family and leave the city because it will be destroyed, warning them not to turn back, and not even to look back on the city or they will die. There is only Lot, his two daughters and his wife who seem to believe what the angels say. That's only four people. They flee the city and God rains destruction down on it. As He does, Lot's wife looks back and turns into a pillar of salt. The cities are left in ashes.

What have we understood from this story? Firstly, the men of the city were corrupt wanting violence and sexual immorality. God saved the people who He found worthy. Which were those who offered help to others, and who believed. God followed through with His destruction of the cities. And then there is the pillar of salt. Oh, how this is widely misunderstood. If someone has raped you, will you turn around to see them again? Or will you be happy they are behind you, never wanting to see them again? What made Lot's wife turn around? It was her desire for those things which were now being destroyed. Understand that salt was used for preservation. She was trying to preserve that wicked way of life and therefore she became a preservative. If we try to preserve that which leads to death, we are no more than a pillar of salt with no life. We are later told we are intended to be the salt of the Earth, that which preserves life, not preserving that which leads to death.

Lot and his daughters ended up living solitarily in a cave where his daughters, desperate to have children, gave Lot enough wine that he passed out drunk and on two

separate occasions of this, they had sex with him without his knowledge and bear children by him who would become the beginnings of the Moabites and the Ammonites. This is important to our understanding. This shows us that clearly there were none who were truly righteous from the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but they were saved because God had a purpose for them still, and God was sparing Abraham from the grief of losing Lot. Everything for God's purpose.

After Abraham and Sarah have their son Isaac, Ishmael begins to tease him. When this happens, Sarah asks Abraham to once again send Hagar and Ishmael away, so at God's direction he does. Ishmael and Hagar move on from there with the promise that God will raise a great nation from Ishmael. Which we know today as the Arab world. There are three main tribes and nine skulls making twelve. Fulfilling the word of God. He always keeps His promise. This is not to hold any negative connotation to people of the Arab world, remembering we are all in the lineage of God's chosen people.

Christian church, pay attention, Abimelech was the commander of the Philistine forces. Since Abraham was living on their land and they knew God was with him, Abimelech came to Abraham and asked him to swear before God that he will not deal falsely with him or his descendants. Abraham agreed and swore to it, however there was a well there which Abraham had dug, and the Philistines had taken from him. When he pointed this out to Abimelech, the well was returned to Abraham. Therefore, Abraham brought sheep and cattle as a gift to them and separated out seven ewe lambs by themselves to be a witness that Abraham dug that well. And then he was able to stay in the land of the Philistines for a long time. Do you not understand, church leaders? The seven lambs represent the church. This was a prophecy for all time. The church was to help bring peace between nations! This struggle continues today. Stay strong in the patient endurance!

Then God decides to test Abraham. He tells him to get his son Isaac and to go to the mountainside, prepare a sacrificial table and sacrifice Isaac on it. Abraham did as he was asked. He took his son, a couple of servants, and a donkey and headed to the place God led him. On the way Isaac asked him where the lamb was that was to be sacrificed, to which Abraham replied that God would provide the lamb. He prepared the table, placed the wood on it and put Isaac on top. He went to draw his knife to slay him when God spoke up and stopped him. When Abraham looked up there was a

sheep there and so he took it and sacrificed it instead. So, he called the place, God will provide. God tells him that now He knows Abraham fears God because he was willing to sacrifice his son to Him. So, he is told he will be blessed, and his descendants will be numerous, take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through them all nations on Earth will be blessed. Why do we teach this as "God will provide, if we are willing to give up even our son" and nothing more? This is to give us understanding of the fear of the Lord. It is not to be generous to God, what do we have that God cannot get on His own? Even our own children can be taken by God whenever He pleases. This requires much more insight. The story reveals to us that obedience brings provision, that faith itself opens the door to understanding. Has the church become so lazy as to not teach others to find this insight, to understand this fear of the Lord? Is the church afraid to scare people by saying "fear of the Lord"? If your mother tells you to take your son and sacrifice them, will you, out of fear of her? If your father tells you to, or your brother? If God did? Yet God does not let it happen. Fear the Lord, not the loss of something in your life. He can take it at any moment! Instead, trust that what is truly good will be restored in its right order.

After some time, Sarah dies, and Abraham purchases a field and cave to have as a family burial site. Since Isaac had lost his mother, Abraham had a wife found for his son named Rebekah and they are married. After that Abraham dies and is buried with his wife.

God's chosen people

Isaac and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. God tells Rebekah there are two nations in her womb that will be separated. One will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger. Understand that in those days the inheritance went to the eldest son. When Rebekah gave birth, Esau came into the world first, followed by Jacob who was holding Esau's ankle at birth. Think for a moment about the birthright and consider that Esau only came first because he was likely stronger and forced his way past Jacob.

Meanwhile Isaac makes a peace treaty with the locals, re-digging the wells his father Abraham had dug in the area, and gaining many possessions. Esau and Jacob grow older, Esau marries, and since Isaac has grown very old, the time comes for Isaac to give Esau his birthright. Isaac asks Esau to go get him some wild game to eat so he can give him his blessing. Esau goes to get it, but after hearing what was taking place, Rebekah informs Jacob, and they work together for Jacob to sneak in and steal the birthright blessing. Isaac could no longer see, so Jacob was able to pretend to be his brother and received the birthright instead of Esau. Perhaps Jacob was finally able to redeem himself after being considered the second born for so long. But when this happened and Esau found out, he begged his father Isaac to give him a blessing as well, to which Isaac told him he would dwell away from Earth's riches and the dew of heaven. He told him he would live by the sword, and serve his brother, but when he grows restless, he would throw his brother's yoke off his neck. This is another example we have of God's people being split.

Out of fear for his life from his brother and with the support of both his parents, Jacob flees and goes to a nearby place where the family has relations. On his journey, Jacob has a vision in a dream of a stairway leading up to the sky and God standing on the top of it. God reiterates to Jacob the promise He made to both Abraham and Isaac that He will give them that land and their people will spread out from there over the whole Earth. There is much said about this vision. But this vision is not the complete picture.

Jacob ends up staying with his uncle where he finds a woman he falls in love with. He makes a deal that he will work for his uncle for seven years and at the end of that time he will be given the woman in marriage. He works his seven years and when the

time comes, his uncle tricks him and gives him a different woman than the one he was hoping for. His uncle says this is because the woman he wanted was his younger daughter, but the older daughter had to be given first, so if Jacob would work another seven years, he would give him the woman he asked for. Jacob does and is given the woman he fell in love with to marry. They are married, but his uncle still does not release him to return home. Jacob makes a deal with his crafty uncle and is able to obtain all of the livestock that is not perfect. Since Jacob was an expert in these things, he was able to breed them in such a way that newborn livestock had some defect in color making them Jacob's property. Now having obtained a great deal of property, he, along with his wives and everything that belonged to his house, made their exit without telling his uncle. They are pursued by his uncle since one of his wives stole a statue from his uncle's house. His uncle catches up but is not able to find the statue. He and Jacob make a covenant of peace that neither will cross a particular line in the road, thereby going their separate ways.

Now on the journey back home, Jacob is told that his brother Esau has heard he is on the way and Esau was coming out to greet them. Jacob takes precautions not knowing how Esau will respond to his arrival. He separates his household into two groups so that if Esau captures one, the other will remain. When Jacob is alone after separating the group, a man approaches him and starts wrestling with him and the two of them continue wrestling all night. This wrestling symbolizes our struggle with the divine, the moment when faith becomes personal. Jacob will not relent. The man even touches his hip and wrenches it, but Jacob does not yield. When daybreak came, the man asked Jacob to let Him go but Jacob refused unless the man blessed him. The man asked Jacob what his name was and after being told, He said that his name would no longer be Jacob but Israel which means he struggles with God. The man says it is because he has struggled with God and men and overcome.

What did God mean when He said Jacob had struggled with God and men and overcome? Jacob tricked his brother out of the inheritance; he tricked his uncle by secretly mating the animals in a certain way and then again by leaving without letting him know. His struggle with men was obvious. What is the struggle with God? Is this simply the wrestling match? No! Knowing the difference between right and wrong is the struggle with God sometimes. It is easy for us to say that Jacob should have let his brother get the inheritance. Or that he should not have bred his uncle's animals in

such a way. Or that he should have told his uncle before leaving. But what was the struggle with God? Are these not all still the struggles with men? The struggle with God is so much more of the spirit. Jacob was not against his brother for the inheritance; he was taking what was rightfully his, even struggling against God for it. For surely God allowed Esau to come out first. Then again when he was tricked with the marriage of the woman he was not intending, he did not relent despite this too being God's will. Then another time with the livestock, he was in a struggle to discern right from wrong as he was being wronged and in turn was not truly doing wrong, yet he was. If his uncle had paid better attention he would have known. Again, when the time came for them to leave, surely, he had an inner struggle with God regarding what was right or wrong since both sides could be seen as being wrong. The message, church leaders, is not that his actions were right and those of the others were wrong or the other way around. The message and *understanding* must be that even when it comes to the questions of the spirit, even when we must wrestle with God and men, as long as we hold strong to our faith, as long as we don't give up the fight, keeping our intentions always on doing what is right for all involved, we overcome! In other words, we are able to ascend the staircase through our diligent struggle. A struggle which is *invited* by God, not punished.

Jacob (now Israel) faces Esau on the road and rather than being met with the fighting Jacob (now Israel) feared, he is met with brotherly love. He is able to set up his tent and live well on the land. They face some troubles but manage to work through things.

The foundation of the twelve tribes of Israel

Israel had twelve sons in all. Leah (his first wife who he was tricked into marrying) had Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Rachel (his second wife and the one he loved first) was not able to give him children at first so she had her servants provide children for them, Dan and Naphtali from Bilhah, and Gad and Asher from Zilpah. However, she was able to give him two male children of her own, Joseph and Benjamin, losing her life to the birth of the last. These will become the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph was favored by his father Israel over his brothers because he was the firstborn of Israel's wife Rachel. Joseph had a dream in which he foresaw that he would be a ruler over his brothers, and again in another dream that he would be ruler over his brothers and his parents. His brothers did not take well to this and one day they plotted to kill him. However instead of killing him, they decided to give him to a group of Ishmaelites (the descendants of Abram and Hagar's son Ishmael) who were on their way to Egypt. So, his brothers sold him to them and then took his robe, shredded it, and covered it in blood so they could convince their father Israel that Joseph had been killed. Israel believed them and mourned the loss of his son.

As the boys aged, one of the twelve brothers, Judah, was married and had several sons. One of his sons married and had no children before he died. As was custom at that time, a widow who had no children was given as a wife to one of their deceased husband's brothers so that they could still have children. Judah decided to give her to one of his other sons, who in turn married her but refused to give her a child therefore he too died. Judah feared that if he gave her his other son, that son too would die. He refused to give her another of his sons, causing her to aimlessly wander in her widow's clothes with no purpose. One day while Judah was out walking, she disguised herself as a prostitute and, not recognizing her, Judah, to his own shame, hired and slept with her and she became pregnant. After discovering who it was, Judah swallowed his shame (although his wife had already died, he was still shamed since it was his daughter-in-law who he impregnated) and never slept with her again. She gave birth to twins. Similar to Esau and Jacob, one of her babies reached his hand out first and the midwife tied a red cloth around its wrist to identify the birth order, but the hand withdrew, and the other child came out first. When this happened, the midwife said, "So,

that is how you will break out." She named the first one Perez which means to break out, and the second born Zerah, which means scarlet. Scarlet is symbolic of sin.

In our understanding, we must first realize the family line of these two children. Both children are in the family line of Judah, which is the same family line of the future king David and eventually Jesus. But at this split, Perez is along the family line of David and Jesus, Zerah is not. Zerah represents sin as symbolized by the scarlet cloth, and Perez represents breaking out. Although sin showed itself first, the family line of Perez would be the breaking out of the Lord into the whole world, right? But remember both of these children were born from an act of deceit. The words of the midwife give us insight into how sin will truly break out into the world. Judah's desire for the prostitute represents our desire for sinful nature- the sin of Adam and Eve, whether in the line of God's chosen people or not. The family line of Perez leads not only to Jesus but also to the Kings of Israel and Judah. Do we not see how sin breaks out under the guise of kings who claim to be God's chosen people yet are still held captive to mankind's sinful nature? Christian church, why is this story not captured in the teachings of the church? And in any case when it is, what message do you give? Do you relate this to the casting out of Satan from heaven? Do you understand the one sent to the Earth the same time as Jesus and the breaking out of sin as it relates? Where is your understanding?

While Judah and the rest of his brothers born of Israel were growing up, marrying, having children, and building their family, Joseph (who was sold by his brothers) was in Egypt. He had made a name for himself as a member of the household of Pharoah's captain of the guard and was doing well until a woman there set him up for a crime he did not commit, and he was thrown in prison. While in prison, he was able to interpret the dreams of a couple of prisoners who were with him. Later after hearing about this, Pharoah, who also had a dream he needed interpreted, called on Joseph to interpret it for him. Joseph is able to interpret the dream which tells about a famine that is coming to the land but not for several more years. Pharoah is pleased with Joseph for interpreting the dream and puts Joseph in charge of the whole land so that he can coordinate the storage of food in preparation for the famine to come. Joseph does well with this and so much grain is stored the Egyptians can't count it all. During this time, Joseph is given a wife and has two sons by her, Manasseh the first born was named this because God had made Joseph forget all his troubles and his father's household,

and Ephraim who was named this because God made Joseph fruitful in the land of suffering.

The famine strikes all the land just as Joseph had interpreted from Pharoah's dream. The famine, however, did not affect Egypt since Joseph had stored so much food. But his family was suffering from the famine, and Israel sends his sons to Egypt to barter with them for food. Israel decided not to send his youngest son Benjamin since he would be too distressed if something were to happen to him. Remember the only two sons he had from the wife he chose were Joseph, who he now believed was dead, and Benjamin. The rest of the boys made the journey to Egypt and were brought before Joseph with their request for food. They were unaware that the man they were brought to see was in fact their brother, and for now Joseph kept it that way. He tested them and asked them many questions about who they were and where they were from. His brothers told him about their ageing father and the other brother who they left back at home. Joseph in turn told them he would send them the food they asked for, but in order to prove they were not there deceitfully he demanded that one of them stay in prison in Egypt while the rest of them go back and bring the youngest brother to prove their story to him.

His brothers made the journey home except Simeon who was kept in prison in Egypt. When they got home, their father Israel was very grieved at the loss of another of his sons. They informed their father that they were not allowed to return to Egypt without bringing Benjamin along, but Israel refused. That is until they again ran out of food. At that point Israel had no choice but to send his sons back to Egypt, this time with Benjamin. When they arrive in Egypt, Joseph keeps up the charade for several days, but eventually his heart gives in for his brothers and he reveals himself to them, telling them he is their brother Joseph who they sold to the Ishmaelites. Being in good standing with Pharoah, he was allowed to send his brothers back home to retrieve the rest of his family and to have them live in Egypt with anything they need there. And so, his whole family moved to Egypt, there were over seventy of them.

When Israel was old and knew he was about to die he called for Joseph's sons, his grandsons, to be brought to him so he could bless them. Now traditionally the first-born son would receive the blessing. When the boys were brought before Israel, he placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. This went against

their tradition as Manasseh was born first and should have had Israel's right hand on him, but when Joseph tried to correct his father about this, Israel told him that he was aware of what he was doing. Israel told Joseph that although Manasseh would become a great nation, Ephraim would be greater than him and his descendants would become a group of nations. Understand that Manasseh was named this because God caused Joseph to forget all his troubles and his father's house. Does this sound like a certain group of people? Those who have indulged in physical desires to forget their troubles and thereby forget God. Ephraim was named this because God made Joseph fruitful in the land of suffering. Israel's blessing was on those who were fruitful in the land of suffering, not those who forgot their troubles and their God! Yet the blessing on Ephraim was not as it seems. It is just to increase in number in the land of suffering, salvation will still be needed. But there is hope! Israel also told Joseph that Manasseh and Ephraim would now be considered Israel's children thus sharing in the inheritance. Understand that even if we indulge in physical desires, or regardless of where we are on the Earth, we are a part of God's chosen people. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, the saying, "May your children be like Ephraim and Manasseh." Meaning, welcomed into God's chosen people, regardless. Christian church, what do you teach about this story?

After giving his blessing to Ephraim and Manasseh, Israel calls in the rest of his sons so he can tell them what will happen to them in days to come.

To Reuben, he says that he is his firstborn excelling in honor and power, however he will no longer excel because he had sexual relations with Bilhah who was his father's wife and mother to two of his brothers.

To Simeon and Levi, he says that their anger and violence are too fierce, and they would be scattered in Jacob and dispersed in Israel.

To Judah, he says that his brothers will praise him and that the scepter and ruler's staff will not pass from him until the one it is destined for arrives and it is given to Him. This is in reference to Jesus.

To Zebulun, he says they will live by the sea and become a haven for ships.

To Issachar, he says he is like a donkey submitting to forced labor.

To Dan, he says Dan will provide justice but in a fierce way like a viper on the roadside biting the ankle of the horse and knocking the rider off.

As he is giving his blessings to them, he stops here and says, "I look for your deliverance, oh Lord." We can understand that these blessings so far have shown that all of his sons fall to some sort of disgrace, or their purpose is removed. It makes sense that he is looking for God's deliverance in his children and not finding it.

To Gad, he says they will be attacked by raiders but will return the attack.

To Asher, he says Asher's food will be rich and he will provide delicacies fit for a king.

To Naphtali, he says that Naphtali will be like a doe who bears fruitful fawns.

To Joseph, he says he is a fruitful vine that no one will be able to destroy because God helps him.

And lastly to Benjamin, he says is a ravenous wolf devouring his prey in the morning and dividing the plunder in the evening.

So, he gave each of them the blessing which was appropriate to each. Note that each one falls into some sort of trouble except for Joseph. But it is important in our understanding at this time to know what becomes of Joseph later when the promised land is divided. The clans, which stemmed from Joseph and Levi, do not get any land in the inheritance. The clan of Levi become the priests, the holy people and therefore they do not receive the inheritance since theirs is with God. When Israel tells Levi they will be scattered in Jacob and dispersed in Israel, we can now understand the meaning of this. The name Jacob means to seize or circumvent. The name Israel means wrestled with God and man and overcame. They will be scattered in trying to seize their own power and dispersed among God's chosen people. Christian church the Levites were your forefather! Understand this message.

Joseph does not get any land. It goes to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Having the only true blessing for his future, it makes sense that Joseph is the only one who does not get an inheritance on the Earth. Joseph's inheritance is in the Lord! Understand. Church, do you teach this in any way or ignore its meaning?

After the blessings are given Israel dies and Joseph along with the rest of the family journey back to the land they came from, Canaan, to bury him there with Abraham and Isaac.

The subjugation and redemption of God's people

As the famine continued, the people now needed to give Joseph their money in order to buy grain from Egypt. When they ran out of money, the people were required to bring their livestock to trade for the grain. Once all the livestock had been taken, the people's only remaining form of payment was themselves and their land, which Joseph also demanded of them. He gave all of them seeds to plant the next crops, but from here on, the people were to give a fifth of their produce to Pharoah and this would end up being a long-standing agreement. Therefore, all the people of Egypt were now in bondage to Pharoah at Joseph's direction. Understand! Why is this story presented as God saved Israel through Joseph? Where does that thought process occur in this story? Joseph just single handedly destined the people to be in bondage to Pharoah. What was saved? All things happen for a reason. Again, God did not err in this! Joseph was not wrong for doing what he did. It is clear that his direction came from God. He had no other choice in the matter. He was doing what he believed was best for all people at that particular time. We cannot expect that he would have known the events which would unfold from this and as we find out, those events were to the glory of God. Therefore, God does all things for a reason! Through injustice, God's plan moved forward, showing again that *understanding* often comes through suffering.

After some time has passed Joseph dies, but before his death, he assures the people they will be brought out of Egypt and returned to the land promised to them by God through Abraham. He asks that when the time comes, they take his bones and bury them alongside his father's Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Sometime later after several generations, a new leader comes to power in Egypt who had no knowledge of the things which occurred in the past or the relationship which had grown between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This new leader saw how numerous the Israelites had become, and he feared they would eventually overpower the Egyptians. Because of this he forced the Israelites into slave labor and issued decrees to have any male children born to them killed. In Joseph's time, he started a form of people which directed all people to help the community with their efforts. Now we see how that communal living became an oppression fueled by fear which has continued to the current state of the world. But, at the time the new leader took his position and issued his threat, there was a man and a woman from the clan of Levi who had a male son born to them. They hid the boy for a few months but eventually could

not hide him any longer. His mother placed him in a basket and floated him on the Nile River knowing he would be found. He was found by one of Pharoah's daughters and was allowed to be raised under her care, naming him Moses. God's plan often begins in hiddenness, deliverance born in the enemy's house.

Moses grew up in the Pharoah's family so it can be assumed he was a high standing member of society there. One day, he was walking through the Israelite district when he saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. When Moses saw this, he struck and killed the Egyptian and hid the body. But soon after, he discovered that what he did was made known and for fear of his life, he fled to the land of Midian. There he was able to find a place to stay and a wife who gave him a son.

One day as Moses was tending the flocks, he saw that one of the bushes nearby was on fire, yet the bush was not burning up. When Moses went over to see why, the Lord spoke to him. God tells Moses that He has heard the complaint of the Israelites and is sending Moses back to Egypt to free them from Pharoah. Of course, Moses questions how he can do this, and God reassures him that he is not doing it alone because God will be with him. When Moses asks how he should answer when he is questioned about God's name, God tells him to answer, "I am has sent me to you." This takes much understanding and therefore God gives him an alternative answer, "The Lord, the God of your fathers- the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob- has sent me to you." And God adds to this, "This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation." In a time of many gods, this was an important clarification. We know God is not just the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of all of us. He is the "I am". We must understand He chose this name for all time so that we would be grounded in our belief, but also so that we might understand He is the God of those who do their best to walk in his ways. He wants us to be like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; working toward bringing all life to his purpose.

God then tells him to gather the Israelite elders and tell them God is going to bring them up out of Egypt and into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Note these are the people who had previously broken off from God's chosen people in the genealogies and were still living in the land promised to God's chosen people. This comes to further understanding as the story

progresses. Then with the elders of Israel, God tells him to go to Pharoah and ask that the people be allowed to go into the desert for three days to hold a festival for their God. But God also points out that Pharoah will not be willing to, yet God will force his hand and not only will they be released but will be sent away with gifts.

Moses asks God what he should do when the people do not believe him or do not believe God sent him. God tells Moses to throw his staff on the ground and when he does it becomes a snake, then He has him pick up the snake and it turns back into a staff. Next, He has him put his hand in his cloak and it comes out leprous, after doing it again, it comes out clean. Then God tells him that if the first miraculous sign does not work perhaps the second will, and if the second does not, that he should take water from the Nile River and pour it on the ground, and it will become blood on the ground. In addition to this worry, Moses also pleads with God that he is not an eloquent speaker and does not trust himself to have the words needed. This upsets God but God tells him to find his brother Aaron who will help him with the speaking required.

Let us understand! The burning bush is symbolic. The bush represents the Israelites, and the flames represent the oppression they face from the Egyptians. Yet despite the flames, the bush is not burnt. Just as lightning and thunder once revealed God's power, here fire reveals His voice again. But this time, the flame does not destroy. After God has explained to Moses several times that He will be with him and will not let any harm come to him, Moses still worried about how to speak to the people. God's anger burned against Moses in that moment but just like the burning bush, God was not going to let anything happen to the Israelites, His chosen people. Despite Moses' concern over speaking to the people, God shows us that His divine purpose will not be hindered by human weakness; understanding begins with obedience, not confidence of self.

As Moses prepares for the journey back to Egypt, God speaks with Moses more and tells him it is safe to go because the people in Egypt who wanted him killed were all dead. He also tells Moses to be sure he performs all the miracles God showed him and that Pharoah will still not let them go. He tells Moses that when this happens, he is to tell Pharoah that Israel is God's first-born son and since Pharoah won't allow His firstborn son to go worship Him, He will kill all of Egypt's firstborn sons.

Moses makes the journey being sure to walk in God's ways as he goes, for example continuing the tradition of circumcision. He meets up with his brother Aaron and recruits him to go along. The two of them meet with the Israelite elders and recruit them as well. With the support of the community, Moses and Aaron go to Pharoah and ask for his permission to take the Israelites into the desert to hold a festival for their God. Pharoah refuses, believing Moses and Aaron are trying to run off with the Israelites. This makes Pharoah angry, and he forces all the Israelites to do more labor than they were required to up to this point. The people, of course, are incredibly distraught at this and begin to blame Moses and Aaron for it. Moses questions God, wondering how, if the Israelites would not listen to him, would Pharoah listen to him. To which God responds that He has made Moses like God and Aaron like a prophet. He reassures Moses that Aaron will handle the speaking, and Moses will handle the miracles.

At this point the book of Exodus goes into great detail with the struggle of Moses and Aaron to get Pharaoh to let the people go. It is important to note here that we should not get caught in the details of the seeming magic behind the ensuing power struggle. Each course of action which takes place is representative of the set of beliefs of the Egyptian people. They worshipped many gods which each controlled different parts of their daily lives such as Hathor the goddess of children, Anuket the god of the Nile, Nephthyrs the river goddess, Heket the goddess of frogs, Isis the goddess of magic, Ammut the devourer, and even one of the most well-known, Ra their sun god. We have found records of over two-thousand different gods that were recognized by the ancient Egyptian people and the story that follows is a resounding example of the futility found in the worship of such deities. We should not get caught up with trying to find faith in the magical occurrences but rather find faith in the truth that denounces all the other gods. Each plague God is going to bring on the Egyptians reveals the emptiness of the gods Egypt trusted in, proving that only the one true God rules creation.

Moses and Aaron go back to Pharaoh and begin the battle against the Egyptian gods by turning the staff into a snake. However, Pharaoh's magicians do the same thing. The story tells us that the snake from Moses and Aaron's staff swallows up the snakes from the magicians. This is where we can first realize that God, through Moses and Aaron, is trying to show the Egyptians the futility inherent in the worshipping of

their gods and their magic. The examples that follow work toward showing this same principle.

The next example tells of Moses and Aaron turning all the water in Egypt including the Nile River into blood. Again, Pharaoh's magicians do the same using their secret ways. But in this example, it is only Moses and Aaron who can turn it back to usable water. Next, they summon frogs from the river to cover the land. Again, Pharaoh's magicians do the same. However, we read that Pharaoh's magicians cannot get rid of the frogs. Pharaoh has to beg Moses to get rid of them. Moses asks God to get rid of the frogs and they are all found dead. But this is not enough to convince Pharaoh. There are many more gods in the Egyptian culture that must be put to the test to show that the true God must be recognized.

For the next example Moses strikes the dust with his staff causing the dust to turn into a plague of gnats. This time the magicians are not able to do the same. The magic, or science if you prefer, of Egypt has been put asunder. Next, they send a swarm of flies to cover the Egyptians, but not the Israelites. At this point Pharaoh starts to become desperate. He tells them they can perform their sacrifice in the city, but Moses and Aaron don't fall for his trickery. They knew that if they did, the Egyptians would stone them for it, an ancient practice of hurling rocks at someone until their death. So, Pharaoh says he will let them go into the desert to do it if he calls off the flies. Moses asks God to take the flies away, but Pharaoh rescinds his promise and does not let them go.

Then the story continues to two more assaults against the Egyptians, a plague to kill their livestock, and boils which break out on the men and the livestock. After that, God dictates through Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh that by now God could've wiped the Egyptians from the face of the Earth, but instead they have been raised up in order to proclaim the power of God, to all the Earth. Moses and Aaron tell Pharaoh to bring in all the remaining livestock and people to shelter because they are going to call down a mighty hailstorm and anything left outside will be killed by the falling hail. They do just that, and Pharaoh becomes desperate again. He tells them if they stop it, he will let them go but again he backs out on his word. His heart is hardened in order that we can all see the truth in the futility of the Egyptian gods.

Moses then threatens Pharaoh with a plague of locusts and in order to stop him, Pharaoh says he will let the men of the Israelites go to sacrifice but no one else. Unsatisfied with the response, Moses calls down the plague of locusts. After the locusts had devoured as much as possible and moved on, Moses calls on God to cover Egypt in darkness for three days with no warning to Pharaoh. This is a strong example of how we can see that the story is disputing the Egyptian beliefs. No matter how much the Egyptians must have reached out to Ra their sun god, the darkness would not lift. At this point Pharaoh tells Moses they can go to sacrifice but must leave their livestock behind. This is still not enough for Moses since they need the livestock to perform the sacrifice.

At this point God was ready to finally force Pharoah to release them. He was going to call down one last plague. Moses and Aaron went to Pharoah one more time and told Pharoah what God was going to do. At midnight He was going to kill every firstborn male of Egypt, from the Pharoah's first-born son to the first-born son of a slave girl, including the first born of the livestock. Just as God had told Moses previously, the Israelites were God's first-born son and since Pharoah would not let them go, He would take Egypt's.

Moses and Aaron have another meeting with the Israelites and warn them of the coming event. In order for them not to lose their firstborns along with the Egyptians, they must have a way of keeping them safe. This is known as the Passover. According to God's instruction, each Israelite household was to sacrifice a lamb that was an appropriate amount of food for the people of their house. It was clear that the sacrifices they made were not killing the animals in vain but were carefully measured so they would not waste. They were to put some of the blood on the doorframe so the homes of the Israelites could be recognized and passed over. Just as Moses and Aaron said, the night came and all the first-born Egyptian sons and male animals were killed. But the homes with blood on the doorframes were passed over as promised.

Finally, Pharaoh gave in. The gods and magic of the people of Egypt had been shown to be futile in the battle. The Egyptians not only let the Israelites go, but gave them clothing, jewels, and other gifts on their way. The people who had worshipped the gods of Egypt had changed their hearts. So, the Israelites left and headed out into the desert. This must have been a sight! There were over six-hundred thousand men

in addition to the women, children, and livestock. Imagine a crowd of over a million people marching out with droves of animals alongside.

Moses led the people into the desert and toward the Red Sea. The Lord went ahead of them as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. As they approached the Red Sea, they could see the army of the Egyptians coming for them. Pharoah, realizing the Israelites were not intending to return, had sent out his forces to attack them and bring them back. As the people began to cry out fearing for their lives, Moses was instructed by God to hold his staff over the water and when he did, a strong wind came and pushed the water back so the people could cross on dry ground. The Israelites made their way across, but the Egyptians were gaining on them, so God threw the Egyptians into confusion and broke the wheels off their chariots slowing them down. As the last of the Israelites reached the opposite shore, the wind stopped, and the water rushed over the full Egyptian army killing every one of them. In so doing, God kept His promise and delivered the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians in addition to putting the fear of God in the Israelites. Understand the fear of the Lord, that anything can be taken from us at any time including our lives. This crossing of the Red Sea helps up to understand baptism- leaving bondage and emerging into new life.

Obtaining the promised land

To recap, we have now learned God created all things for a purpose we do not yet realize. We know that we were put on this Earth as part of the habitat. We have learned that the knowledge of good and evil is a test for us. We have learned that every intention of our hearts is wicked from birth. We have learned that it is possible for individuals to break away from that wicked tendency like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did. We have learned that the people who break away from that wicked tendency live separate from those who don't. We have learned that God is able to bring down punishment on mankind in whatever form He pleases, yet we also learned He does not do this without justification. We learned that all things happen to suit God's purpose, even those things which do not appear to be founded in the goodness and love we would expect, inevitably serve God's purpose. We also learned that God's chosen people were predestined for certain milestones. The next of which is their inheritance of the promised land, yet they still needed to earn it. The message is not yet complete nor is our *understanding*.

After the people traveled in the desert for several days they were upset and complained to Moses and Aaron because they did not have water to drink. When the group stopped near some water, they could not drink it because it was bitter. However, Moses put his staff in the water, and it turned sweet, so they were able to drink it. When this happened, the Lord said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you." This is the test.

Shortly after that, the people began complaining there was no food for them to eat. They complained to Moses and Aaron saying it would have been better for them if they had stayed in Egypt where at least they had food to eat. Moses and Aaron of course questioned why the people were complaining to them, rather than trusting in God. God tells them they are to go out that evening and collect meat, and from then on, they are to go out every morning, except on the seventh day and collect the bread God was going to give them and, in this way, God was going to test them. Moses and Aaron gave this instruction to the people and that evening the land was covered with pheasants for them to gather and eat. The following morning, the people went out to collect bread as they were instructed. The bread was something they had never seen before, white

wafers that were sweet to the taste and would dissolve in the heat of the day. The people named it manna. Each morning, they were to gather enough for that day, and they were not to keep it until the following day. Most of the people did this, however some saved their leftovers for the following day only to find them covered in maggots and inedible. But on the sixth day, they were told to gather double and that they could save half for the seventh day so that they would not have to go out and gather it on the sabbath day.

Understand the meaning of this! God rested on the seventh day because His work was finished. Even though the people had not finished, let alone realized their work, God was allowing them to rest on the seventh day. What is the purpose of this? Why do we hold the Sabbath or seventh day as holy? God is teaching us the rules to follow in order to live a life rightly in His way. The message is to remember that our time of rest comes only when our work is finished. If the people did not collect enough manna on the sixth day, then they would have nothing on the seventh. And what was the work they needed to finish? Understand the only two rules here, don't take extra or try to keep extra, and gather up for a day of rest. We need to shed the excess from our lives and prepare the food of the spirit for our time of rest! Christian church, handing out a wafer shaped like the description of the manna during the services held, does not relay this message. Christ is the new bread of life and teaches us that feeding our spirits is much more important than feeding our bodies. God will provide the food we physically need even if that means we eat some strange bread we find laying around in the morning, it will be enough to see us through, but the food of the spirit is what delivers us to the promised sabbath. Furthermore, a life devoted solely to working does not allow time to rest our spirit or to give God the thanks we owe. We must have times of rest which are devoted to keeping our minds true to our purpose, God's purpose for us in this life. That mysterious purpose we struggle to understand due to our lack of devoting time toward it. Understand! There is still more to the sabbath day than we realize even at this point in the story.

More time passes and the people are without water again. They go to Moses and complain wondering if God is among them or not. God tells Moses to take his staff and strike a rock with it. He does this in front of the elders of Israel and water flows from the rock which they are all able to drink.

After this, the people are attacked by the Amalekites. Moses has their forces gathered to battle them and he holds his staff up over his head from a nearby hill while the battle goes on. As long as he is holding up his staff the Israelites are winning, but if he lowers it, the Amalekites are winning. He is helped to hold the staff high until the Israelites ultimately win the battle. God tells Moses to write about this battle because He will wipe out the memory of Amalek. Understand a couple of things here. First and foremost is that God is our banner. If we hold Him high above all else, then we can overcome any battle we face in our lives. Secondly, Amalek was the grandson of Esau. Remember Esau split from the line of God's chosen people and his descendants became the Amalekites. Every division that broke off from the lineage of God's chosen people are at odds with the Israelites and each will be destroyed in time according to God's plan.

Now Moses received a visit from his father-in-law Jethro. Jethro saw Moses sit as judge in front of the people helping them to determine what God's will would be in the disputes they would have. With over a million people, this must have been a daunting task. Jethro suggests to Moses that he elect judges from the people, choosing those who fear God and who hate dishonest gain. They can handle the simple cases, and Moses can be brought the more difficult ones to consult God on. In this way Moses would be able to handle the workload better. Moses finds this to be a good suggestion and does so. This sounds very similar to our current judicial system aside from one major deviation, they should fear God and hate dishonest gain. That is quite the opposite of those seated on our modern-day judicial courts. Understand!

When the people reached mount Sinai, God told Moses to tell the people that if they obey God fully and keep His covenant, then out of all nations they will be His treasured possession. Even though the whole Earth is God's, they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Moses tells the people, and they agree to obey God. God then tells Moses to have the people consecrated, which means- made clean or holy, for two days and on the third day God was going to come down to the top of mount Sinai and the people would hear Him speaking to Moses so that they would trust Moses. Moses prepared the people and on the third day there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud covered the mountain so that the people could not see the top. There was also a long loud trumpet blast which told the people to gather at the base of the mountain. The mountain was covered in smoke which billowed up from it because the Lord

descended on it in fire. The mountain trembled violently, and the trumpet sound grew louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. God descended onto the top of the mountain and called for Moses and Aaron to come up to Him, but the others were not allowed to. That is when God spoke the ten commandments to all the people.

"It was a volcano." That's the easy way out, isn't it? Fire broke out on it, a cloud covered it, and smoke billowed, the mountain trembled violently, and there was a loud sound of a long trumpet blast. Would you stand there while a volcano erupts? Or would you do what Moses and Aaron did and climb a volcano while it erupted? In fact, afterwards the people ask Moses to speak to them himself and not to let God speak directly to them anymore because their fear of the Lord was too great. Moses told them, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Understand! It was fierce. That was the point. Fear the Lord as any of us would have had we been there!

The words God spoke were the ten commandments. You must have no other gods before me. You must not make, for yourselves, an idol. You must not misuse the name of the Lord. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not give false testimony. You must not covet. These are the commandments we have heard many times in our lives. But in addition to this God tells them to make an altar of earth and to burn sacrifices to Him on it. He says to make pillars of stone as altars and wherever He is honored He will come to them and bless them. This is important. We should note that the ten commandments are later summed up by Jesus to be one commandment which covers them all. Love God with all your heart, walk in all His ways, and love your neighbor as yourself. But for the time of Moses, the people needed more defined rules in order to set the stage for that. These are gruff people who are experiencing something completely new to them. Specific instruction was needed.

When Moses went up the mountain, God gave him laws to put in place for the people to follow regarding the handling of servants, who is accountable when someone causes injury to another, keeping their property secure, being responsible as a society, laws for the Sabbath, and the festivals they should hold in remembrance of how they

got there. Moses returned and told the people all the laws God had set for them, and they agreed to follow them. Moses has them burn an offering to the Lord and he takes half of the blood from the offering and sprinkles it on the people saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Later Jesus would replace this covenant as well with His blood being the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, but for now, the people were not ready for that.

God then calls for Moses to once again go up the mountain to speak with Him and Moses goes up for forty days and forty nights. Understand when God sent the flood on the Earth, the rains lasted forty days and forty nights for God to destroy all life on Earth except the few He saved and made a covenant with. Now that God had given the people rules of law to live by, and the people agreed to live by them, there would be a new covenant which was given to them after waiting for Moses for forty days and forty nights. It is also important to point out that the covenant which comes later from Jesus at the time of His crucifixion was at the age of forty. We find this number forty in many places which all seem to be a time of trial for the people. Surely the people faced a time of trial waiting 40 days and nights for Moses to return to them.

During those forty days and nights God gives Moses the plans and details of how to prepare a tabernacle which is a tent that would contain a wooden ark, like a box, in which would be placed the stone tablets containing the inscription of the law, or covenant which He was going to send with Moses. There is a lot of detail in the text regarding the materials to be used, the size of each feature, and the detail work to be used in the design and appearance of these items. Essentially this is what God calls for to be built, a large tent to serve as a courtyard, inside of this would be an alter for burnt offerings, a wash basin near the alter, a table for the plates, cups, bowls, etcetera, an incense altar and a lampstand. In addition to those items, also inside the courtyard tent would be a second smaller tent called the tabernacle. Behind these tent curtains would be the inner chamber where the ark would be kept. This would be considered the most holy place and above the ark is where God would speak to Moses going forward.

This message takes much insight and as with the other messages we have considered, this one too comes up again later. Some of the details we should note here are

the ark along with many other aspects of the building such as the tent pillars and the table are designed by God to be made out of acacia wood. Acacia wood is extremely durable. It has unique grain patterns. The trees can grow to over eighty feet tall, and it's naturally waterproof. All of that sounds good and makes good sense as to why it was chosen, however, the acacia trees and shrubs are covered in thorns. Understand, to make a sacred place for God to speak with Moses and to dwell with the people, they were going to have to work hard fighting the thorns and gathering the materials needed for this. There were also details given regarding the plating of items with gold or the fashioning of items from solid gold or silver. Do you think God requires things we find physical value in? This is not the message! In order to understand, let's consider another detail God has put forth in the design of this tabernacle and courtyard. God gives the details for a lampstand to be made with seven oil lamps on one stand and rows made to look like branches extending from it with cups on them in the shape of almond blossoms. Understand Almonds were a common crop in that time and area. The almond tree blossoms at the tail end of winter just before the leaves come out. Because of this, the almond blossom is considered to be a symbol of awakening or rebirth. Furthermore, the ark which will contain the stone tablets on which the law is inscribed is to have a cover with two cherubim on it. Remember the garden of Eden is now protected by two cherubim.

Imagine approaching the outer courtyard tent with its beautifully adorned curtains. Now imagine we have just opened the outer courtyard tent. When we enter, the first thing we see is the altar for burning sacrifices, the wash basin, the incense altar, and the table adorned with plates, cups, and bowls of pure silver and gold. Stop picturing the beauty of it and think instead about the meaning of it. The adornment was provided by the people as an offering to the Lord. The burnt offering alter is a similar message. We need to sacrifice the excess in our lives. Those things of physical value should be meaningless to us. We should devote to the Lord those things we find beautiful and appealing rather than to ourselves. We should sacrifice the extra in our lives in thanks to the Lord for our lives. In so doing, we clean ourselves and can be led by the light of our lampstand to the most holy place, the inner tabernacle. Only those who have been consecrated can enter the innermost chamber. Inside of there is the ark of the covenant protected by the two cherubim. Do we not see the path here? Every temple, tent, or building has a way in and a way out. In order to get to the innermost chamber, we have to clean ourselves, remove the excess from our lives by devoting it

to the Lord, walk in God's light following the hope of awakening and rebirth, and by obeying God's law we will gain access to the garden containing the tree of life! Christian church, this message does not give us a blueprint for how we should adorn our sanctuaries. Nor does it simply mean the people needed to show respect to God. There is a deeper meaning in this. Do you not understand the tabernacle, Solomon's temple, and Ezekiel's temple? Teach the message!

The people waited while Moses was on the mountain and after some time, they started to question what happened to Moses and why he had not yet returned. So, they went to Aaron assuming Moses was not going to return and asked Aaron to make a god for them to follow. The people are showing their need for a god. They are just like Lot's wife looking back as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, trying to preserve their old way of life. Understand how Aaron discerned his decision. He knew the people were growing anxious and they wanted a representation of their God. However, they were looking for it in the wrong way. But Aaron, with the best of intentions, must have thought if he fashioned a golden calf for them and then held a festival for the Lord, that he would satisfy their need for a figure to be present in front of them which represented the Lord. So, he had them gather their gold and using a tool he made a golden calf. When the people saw it, they said it was their Lord, and they held a festival. God is not a calf. We cannot represent Him with anything we feel like using, there is only one God, and He should not be represented with any symbol. This is the reason for their sin. They had taken what was desirable to mankind and attempted to devote it to the Lord, however in so doing they were misrepresenting what God is, using His name in vain, putting another God before Him, and worshipping a golden cow, an idol. They had broken more than one commandment in doing this. In their festival they made sacrifices to the golden calf. Understand they were intending it to be representative of God, but God is not a calf. Look at the symbols used today to represent God. There are so many- crosses, fish, chalices with grapes, etcetera. Yet God is not one of them, they might as well be golden calves. This is not what Jesus means when He says to lift up our cross and follow Him. The people's impatience shows that physical freedom (their escape from the Egyptians) means nothing without spiritual understanding.

God tells Moses what the people are doing back at the base of the mountain and says that He is going to destroy them for their sins. Moses, however, pleads with God

stating that if God destroys them, the rest of the world will see it as God taking them from Egypt just to kill them and His name will not be glorified in doing this. God relents and Moses returns down the mountain with the stone tablets in hand which contain the word of God written by the hand of God Himself. When he gets to the bottom, the people are celebrating and singing and dancing. Moses is furious and throws the tablets smashing them to pieces. He then takes the golden calf, melts it down and grinds it to dust. He puts it in the drinking water and makes the Israelites drink it. When he asks Aaron what happened, Aaron lies and says the people grumbled, so he took their gold and threw it in the fire, and the calf just happened to come out of the fire. Clearly, he is trying to fool Moses into believing the calf came out miraculously, however, Moses knew better since God told him what was happening. All the people were acting out and not following God's commands. Moses calls for anyone who is for the Lord, and the Levites come forward. These are the tribe of people who would be the priests to them all. Moses tells them to arm themselves and to kill their brother, their friend, and their neighbor. That day about three-thousand Israelites were killed. Afterwards Moses tells them that they have been set apart for the Lord because they were against their own sons, and brothers.

Understand, God does not want us to kill. However, we know God wants us to remove those things from our lives which cause us to sin. These people were causing the others to sin. Regardless, if it is someone in our own household, after attempting to bring them closer to God, if they are not for the Lord, we should remove them from our lives and in so doing we will be blessed. Be willing to sacrifice. Thou shalt not kill. How does this get reconciled? Moses told the Levites to kill. Understand, God was going to destroy them all, but in an effort to glorify God's name rather than denounce it, Moses took this responsibility on himself and the Levites. They did what they did in order to glorify God's name! This is *not* something we need to do anymore in today's age. We are not in the position Moses was. As we have learned God does not shy away from correction. If His chosen people are working against His purpose, He will interject. Unless we have spoken with God in the same way Moses had, we have no right to make His correction for Him. Only in this way would our killing bring glory to God's name. Jesus later tells us that we should not fight back. If God still has purpose in our life and we walk in all His ways, He will not let us die. If our death in some way brings Glory to God's name, then we should be grateful for that opportunity. We must understand.

Moses speaks with God again asking His forgiveness for the great sin the people have committed. Moses tells God that if He will not forgive them, then He should blot Moses out of the book He has written. God in turn says that anyone who sins against Him will be blotted out of the book and He calls a plague down on the people as punishment. He tells Moses to lead the people to the promised land, but His angel will go before them, no longer will God go before them because He believes His anger will cause Him to destroy the people if He were to go with them. This made the people saddened by their guilt. God tells them to remove their ornaments and then He will decide what to do with them. The people obey this request and remove their jewelry and ornaments. Understand! Even the jewelry and ornaments are an idol! Simply by wearing them, the people were still showing that those things had some value. It makes sense that Moses put the gold dust from the golden calf into their drinking water. The message is, what value does it have? Can it provide life in the same way the water God has provided does? Understand.

Moses speaks to God again and asks how anyone will know that God is pleased with them unless God goes with them. God agrees with this logic and says He will do what Moses asked because He is pleased with him. Moses asks God to show him His glory. God agrees to do this also but with limitations. God tells Moses that all His goodness will pass before Moses and then God will cover him in a cleft in a rock with His hand as He passes by, then removing His hand, allowing Moses to see His back but not His face because no one can see the face of God and live. Understand, this means the face of God cannot be seen in our existence as we know it. Here is part of the mystery of God and calls out our faith. Moses is told to cut two more tablets just like the first ones and to return up the mountain so they can be written on as the last ones were. Moses spends another forty days and nights up on the mountain with God. This time the people wait patiently and when Moses returns after seeing the Glory of the Lord, his face is glowing with radiance. The people are scared at first, but Moses reassures them and from then on, he wears a veil to cover his face only removing it when he spoke to God.

Moses told the people all God had commanded, and they proceeded to manufacture all the components for the tabernacle and the courtyard around it. They completed their work and once it was done, the cloud which had been going before them during the day settled over the tent and on any day that the cloud lifted, the people

would continue their travels and any day the cloud did not lift, they stayed in place until it did.

The next part of the story goes into the details of the laws God dictated to Moses for the people to live by. It is important for us to understand time and circumstance as it relates to God's purpose for us. For thousands of years at this point God has been working with His chosen people to build them up. They have now become numerous, but they are still nomadic people. They have no place to call home other than the land which has been promised to them, yet they have not reached it. In those days civilizations were building structural cities with walls around them, but the outliers were nomadic, traveling the countryside and living in tents. All the surrounding communities worshipped different gods, and this was now the time for God to teach the people why the worship of those gods was futile. Now that His chosen people had increased in number and were about to take ownership of the promised land, they needed to have a rule of law to live by which would separate them from the traditions and practices of the other groups of people at that time. It is important to understand where those other groups of people came from. We know when God sent the great flood, all life on Earth was taken except those set apart by God. Therefore, we know that at this time all people on Earth are from the line of God's chosen people. Yet there were those who broke away from following God's way of life and started coming up with their own ideas of how things came to be and which god to worship, in fact all other groups did. The group of Israelites was the only remaining group to still attempt to follow God's word. God's message to Aaron was "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses." In saying this God is explaining the purpose of the book of law.

Many say that the book of law was given to the people to help them survive those things which we now know from science cause us to suffer. Things such as keeping ourselves clean and sanitary to avoid infectious disease or eating appropriate food to avoid sickening ourselves. But it goes beyond just our physical wellbeing and also gives them laws to help them live cleanly in their spirits and actions toward each other. God also gives them a warning saying, "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled, so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its

inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you." This is important! Look at us today!

But God gives hope always and tells the people, "Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety." We already have foresight into the story, and we know the people are not able to do this. However, do not forget we are learning about a group of God's chosen people at a certain time in their growth. Each step taken is cumbersome but leads to the next step always in God's plan. Everything for a reason. These laws lay the foundation for what Jesus later clarifies for us. They are important not just for the people of that time, but also in our lives today. Jesus tells us that it is not so important to follow the law, sometimes doing right means circumventing a law, but the people had to start somewhere. We have done this as a collective continually since that time. Our books of law today are in volumes taking up entire buildings because there are so many. These are not the laws of God but of men. However, we know at this point all things happen for a reason in God's purpose, and this original book of law feeds our current attempt at such a book. We can all admit that our laws today are for the intended betterment of society, yet how overwhelmingly cumbersome. The clarification Jesus gave us was turned into amendments to laws repeated over and over for thousands of years. How can we understand Jesus's one law, one commandment, love the Lord your God with all your heart, walk in all His ways, and love your neighbor as yourself, if we don't understand the basic everyday laws which we should live by in order to do this? Understand the laws both old and new. But put into practice those which lead us to walk in all God's ways. These laws were not meant to bind people, but to reveal right and wrong, good and evil- the very knowledge first found in the garden. Therefore, what was lost through disobedience begins to be restored through instruction.

Now that there was a book of law, the people needed to organize. They took a census and there were over six-hundred thousand men over the age of twenty who were able to enlist in the army. This does not include women or children or elderly or disabled. Imagine the large group of people. They grouped themselves into divisions based

on their family lineage. Remember these Israelites all came from the lineage of Jacob later known as Israel, and they were based on the twelve tribes we have already learned about. Each group would have their specific area in the traveling encampment, and each would have their own duties and responsibilities.

Not only did they organize into groups, but each group was instructed on how they should accomplish the tasks they were given. They organized their belongings and who would be responsible for them. They organized the sounding of certain trumpet blasts to signify certain events to all the people. They organized the ceremonies they would have and the celebrations they were to recognize. And now with the group organized and having a book of law to follow, they could continue their travels. Up to this point they had left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and had been in the Sanai peninsula.

They still had a long way to go in order to reach the promised land. And of course, along the way, the people complain again about not having food other than the manna they collected each day. Moses took their complaint to God and in return God tells them they will have enough quail to keep them full for a month! Imagine the number of quail required to feed over a million people for a whole month. The quail came in and covered the ground around their camp, and they ate their fill. But because of their lack of faith and their desire for other food, God sent a plague with the quail. Again, the lesson here is not God will provide, it's that we don't need the extra or other options, we have what God already knows we need, and it is offensive to grumble and complain about the gifts God has given us! Christian church, when will your manna be enough to satisfy you?

Now the people are getting near the land of Canaan. God tells Moses to send a leader from each of the tribes to go together into the land and explore it in order to bring back a report of the condition of the people and the land. The men go and travel the land of Canaan and are gone for forty days. Again, another time of trial. Upon their return, they give the report that the land is flowing with milk and honey, in other words it was fertile and good land. However, they also report that the people there are powerful and in large, fortified cities. They spread the report that it will not be possible for them to take the land from those living in it, the descendants of Anak, the Amalekites, the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites. These of course are some of the groups of people we know split off from the genealogies many centuries before. They

tell the Israelites that all the people in the land are huge, and they cannot defeat them in battle. However, there were two men who had gone in with the group to investigate the land who believed they would be able to take it since God was with them, their names were Caleb and Joshua.

After hearing the negative report, the people lose hope. Once again God is ready to make a correction to His purpose. He is growing weary of the people not trusting Him. Yet again, Moses pleads with God stating that if He destroys the Israelites now, the rest of the peoples in the land will say that He is the god who could not deliver His people to the land He promised them. God states that instead of destroying them, He will punish them by not allowing them to live in the land. At this time, the people had only spent a couple of years on their journey, but now God was going to turn them back and lead them back toward the Red Sea. Now they were going to have to suffer wandering that desert for forty years until that generation had all perished and their children would be given the land to live in. The only exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua since they had faith, and the others did not. There was a band of Israelites who, after hearing God's judgment, thought they would be able to go to the land and take it. Moses warned them not to, but they attempted and were beaten by the Amalekites and Canaanites. Understand the message here, in order to get to the promised land, the people needed collective faith. They needed to trust in God and without it, they would not be allowed into the land. This is important!

Another group of Israelites, two-hundred and fifty men, decide to approach Moses and Aaron with the complaint that Moses and Aaron put themselves over the other Israelites. The argument is that if God is with all of them, why should Moses and Aaron be the ones to tell the people what to do. Moses tells them to each bring an incense censer before the tent and God will show them who He chooses. When they all show up with their censers, God tells Moses and Aaron to move out of the way so He can destroy the others. But again, Moses intervenes and pleads with God asking if God will kill all the people when only a couple have sinned. The two men who started this rebellion had not shown up with the others. Moses called for them, but they would not come out. So, Moses told the assembly that they will know it is God's direction they follow and not Moses's if those two men die from an act of God rather than the normal causes of death they see. At that, the ground opened under the two men's tents and they, their tents, and all their belongings were swallowed up by the Earth and the

ground closed over top of them. Then fire came out from the Lord and consumed the men holding the incense censers. Moses has the censers collected and flattened to place them over the altar as a symbol to the people because the censers were now holy since the men who sinned presented themselves before the Lord and their lives were taken. Understand, this is a message of meaning to us. If we are to present ourselves before the Lord, and we are found to be sinners, we will not live! Think about the time of judgment.

As the people continue wandering in the desert, they again reach a point when they have no water to drink. Again, they complain to Moses and Aaron as if it were their doing. Moses and Aaron ask God for guidance in this again and God tells them to take the staff, approach a rock and speak to it and water will flow from it. So, Moses took the staff and he and Aaron gathered the people in front of the rock. Moses says to the people, "Listen you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then he hit the rock twice with his staff and the water rushed out. Because of this, God tells Moses "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." There is much confusion related to this passage. Many say God was upset because He told them to speak to the rock, but Moses hit it with the staff. Although that plays a part in this, it is the words Moses used which truly tell his failing in this. He told the Israelites, "Must *we* bring you water out of this rock?" That was his error. Moses knew that it was not him or Aaron bringing the water out of the rock, it was God who would do this. Instead of presenting to the Israelites that God would provide them water, he proclaimed it as Aaron and himself doing it. Moses had a heavy burden no doubt. It is evident that being in God's grace takes constant awareness of our thoughts, words, and actions. Moses's thoughts were troubled by the people grumbling to him and Aaron. His words misled the people, and his action was not what God had instructed. It is important not to fall away from God in a moment of frustration!

As the people continued to move about, they needed to pass through Edom. However, the Edomites would not allow them to and came out to attack the Israelites causing them to flee. Remember the Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob's (Israel's) twin brother. Around this same time, Aaron dies. They are also confronted by the Canaanite king and on a separate occasion the Amorites. The Israelites are

successful in defeating both of them. But there is one enemy that sneaks their way into the ranks of the Israelites, Moab.

Balak was the king of Moab and, seeing the strength of the Israelites, was concerned they would overtake his people and land. He summoned Balaam, who was a prophet in his land and asked him to come and put a curse on the Israelites. Balaam consulted God and was told by God not to go with them because the Israelites are blessed. However, King Balak was persistent and sent another envoy to request Balaam to come and curse the Israelites. This time God tells Balaam since they persisted, he should go with them but only do what God tells him to do. The next day he mounts his donkey and heads out. Along the way God placed one of His angels on the road and after seeing the angel, the donkey goes off course. Balaam beats the donkey to get it back on course. Then again in a narrow path between two vineyards with walls on the sides, the angel of the Lord is there, and the donkey moves to the side crushing Balaam's leg against the wall which brings another beating on the donkey. Then again, a third time, the angel of the Lord was standing in a narrow passage with no room to maneuver in either direction. The donkey lays down stopping completely causing Balaam to beat it again. At this, the donkey speaks and asks Balaam why he has beaten it three times. Balaam says it is because the donkey had made a fool of him. Then the donkey asked him, knowing that it was his donkey, whether he had ever treated him that way before. At that question Balaam's eyes were opened so he could see the angel of the Lord. The angel tells Balaam that he has come there to oppose him because Balaam's path is a reckless one before the Lord. Balaam immediately feels remorse for his beating of the donkey and begs forgiveness. The angel tells him to continue on the path following the men back to Moab but to make sure he only says what God tells him to say. Understand the angel was telling Balaam to open his eyes and be aware. He first told Balaam to only do what he tells him to do. The donkey was that vessel telling Balaam what God wanted him to do, he just didn't see it. Now God was telling him to only say what God tells him to say.

Upon arriving, Balaam tells Balak that he can only say what God tells him to say. Balak asks him to call a curse on the Israelites. After going to a place where they could see some of the Israelite people, Balaam consults God and is told to give the Israelites a blessing rather than a curse. So, he does. His message contains a blessing on the Israelite people and this important phrase, "I see a people who live apart and do not

consider themselves one of the nations." This gives testimony to our understanding of God's chosen people set apart from the rest of the world. This is not what Balak had in mind so he takes Balaam to another location where he can see more of the Israelites. Balaam again consults God and is told to give the Israelites another blessing containing this important phrase, "The Lord their God is with them, the shout of the king is among them." Although Balaam is giving the blessing to the Israelites, he is also giving insight to Balak regarding who the Israelites are and what their strengths and weaknesses are, however Balak does not yet understand this. Thinking this is still a blessing to the Israelites, Balak moves Balaam to another location where they can see all the Israelites. Balaam again consults God and gives the Israelites another blessing with this important phrase, "Their king will be greater than Agog, their kingdom will be exalted." Balak becomes furious with Balaam for only giving blessings when he is asking for a curse. In response Balaam gives an unsolicited oracle telling of the coming of Jesus and of the fate of some of the Amalek, the Kenites, Kittim, Asshur, and Eber. It should be noted here that Balaam is speaking of the coming of Jesus and follows that with the fate of these peoples. These peoples clearly represent groups of people on Earth for a time beyond Jesus. We should understand this at least from one statement in it, "Ah, who can live when God does this? Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to ruin." This takes insight. After giving his final oracle, Balaam leaves and heads home.

The very next part of the story is that the Israelite men started falling in love with the women of Moab. They began taking them in marriage and participating in worshiping their gods or the Baal of Peor. When word of this reached the leaders, God instructed Moses to have the Israelite judges kill the men who took on this behavior. As they are weeping and doing this, one Israelite man brings a Midianite woman (the Midianites were in alliance with the Moabites) into the tent and seeing this, one of Aaron's sons goes into the tent and drives a spear through both the man and woman killing them both. This action lifts the plague, and they no longer must kill the others. Then God tells them from now on they are to treat the Midianites as enemies. We must understand what happened here.

When Balaam was riding his donkey and it kept stopping, he did not recognize it was God who was stopping the donkey. Three times he beat the donkey without recognizing it. Then, three times, Balak asks Balaam to curse the Israelites and yet they

get blessed each time. It seems that Balaam has taken the place of the donkey doing what God asked but Balak was not seeing God's part in this. Do we think Balaam saw God's purpose in this? He didn't see it with the donkey and the angel, how could he see it now? Do we see it? After being told three times that the Israelites were blessed with no way to do them harm by calling a curse down, or by attacking them, it was made clear to Balak that another method of cursing them was necessary, inception which would bring a curse down on themselves. The next thing we discover happens is that the Israelites are being seduced by the Moabite women who in turn are convincing the men to worship their gods instead. Therefore, as Jesus later tells us, Balaam who taught Balak how to entice the Israelites to sin. Balaam showed Balak that the Israelites could not just have a curse called down on them, but they were men and had desire. Now we have to question why God would lead the Israelites to fall into this sin. Couldn't God have just killed any of the Moabite women before they were able to seduce them? This has already been shown to be within His power. But that is not the purpose. Instead, this message is for all of us! Do not let sin creep in among us! Understand, it is part of the test. Our eyes must be opened. Once again, we see how suffering cycles to *understanding*.

Now the Israelites were close to the promised land. Moses at God's request takes a census of the people and all of the Israelites who came with them from Egypt had now passed away and only their children were left except for Caleb and Joshua as God had promised. But this also meant the time was coming for Moses to die since he was also told he would not be allowed to enter the promised land. Before Moses' death, God has Moses make some final preparations for the people- assigning who would be responsible for leading them, and at God's command Moses leads them in battle against the Midianites. They went to battle and killed every man in Midian, including the five kings, and Balaam. They captured the women and children and took all the plunder. When the army returned with all the women, Moses was furious because they were the ones who seduced the men of Israel and caused them to fall away from the Lord. So, Moses has the women who had slept with a man before killed and all of the young boys too. It sounds like a horrible thing but remember everything for God's purpose and all the people are God's people, those He destroys and those He lifts up, each with a purpose! Again, time and circumstance are required knowledge in our understanding of this. In our time today, Jesus has told us that killing of this nature is *no longer* of any benefit to glorifying God's name.

After defeating the Midianites, Moses makes a few more preparations for his death making sure the people have a clear plan to move forward with taking the promised land. Moses warns them in every way he knows how, to follow the law of God. The most profound statement for us in our time, he makes to the Israelites before he dies when speaking to them about how they should live is, "After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time- if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God and provoking Him to anger, I call on heaven and Earth as witness against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the Lord will drive you. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell. But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things happen to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey Him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath." We must seek the Lord with all our hearts and all our souls! God hoped that the people would have walked in all His ways then, but He has a plan and a purpose that is unshakable. Thus, those later days have come! Return to the Lord our God and obey Him!

Moses wrote all the laws in a book which he had placed next to the ark of the covenant, knowing the people would later need it. He also, at God's direction, gave his assistant Joshua the task of leading the people into the promised land. God, knowing the people would turn away from Him eventually, gave Moses a song to teach the people so that they would remember why the hardships they face have come upon them. Within that song, as its lyrics speak of the Israelites becoming complacent with their blessings and turning from God, the Lord says, "I will hide my face from them, and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful." And then later in the lyrics, "They are a nation without sense, there is no discernment in them. If only they were wise and would *understand* this and discern what their end will be!" How often we hear each other question where God is now. He told us He would hide His face from us and see what our ending would be. And further

stating if only we would be wise and understand what our end will be. Do we not see that we still don't understand, we still lack discernment?

After giving blessings to the tribes, Moses went up on a mountain and saw the land they were going to possess and on that mountain he died. It was in the land of Moab, and he was buried there in Moab, yet there is no record of exactly where he was buried. Moses reached *understanding*. He saw the promise, though he did not touch it.

At this time, the Israelites are east of the Jordan river and in order to move into the promised land, they needed to cross over the river. To ensure the people would know God was with them, Joshua has the Levite's carry the ark of the covenant into the river and as soon as their feet touched the river, the water stopped flowing up-stream and the people were all able to cross over on dry ground. After the people made it across, the ark was carried out and as soon as they reached the other shore, the river began flowing again. Just as God showed the people that He was with them by having Moses part the Red Sea, God showed them again He was still with them by stopping the Jordan river. Therefore, Joshua represents the continuation of obedience; the next generation inheriting the call that began with Moses.

After crossing the Jordan, the Lord tells Joshua to have all the Israelites circum-cised, since these were the next generation from those who left Egypt, they had not yet been circumcised. Once they healed from this, they then celebrated the Passover, since it had been exactly forty years to the day since the original Passover which released them from the grip of Egypt, it was the time for that very celebration. And once the celebration was over, the people ate the first food obtained from the promised land, and that was the same day the manna stopped appearing for them.

Now the Israelites were going to face the challenge of uprooting and defeating those who were living on the promised land. The first city they came to was Jericho. The city had a great wall around it and the fighting men would have no way in. The Lord tells Joshua to have the ark march around the outside of the city wall led by seven priests blowing trumpets with guards to the front and rear for seven days. And on the seventh day after marching around again, they were to have a long loud trumpet blast sound and have the people all shout at the same time. So, this is what they did and on that seventh day when the loud trumpet blast blew, and the people all shouted, the

walls of the city crumbled and they were able to go in and take over the city, killing everything living in it with the exception of one family who had helped them in spying out the city beforehand. In today's time, we know that sound is a vibration. We also know that with enough vibration, rock can crumble. Is it so hard to believe God could do this on a scale of this magnitude? The fall of Jericho shows that victory comes, not through might, but through obedience. Faith expressed through action.

Then we have the other moral dilemma which tests the faith of many. How is the killing of those who were living in that city justified? Remember and understand, God is not shy regarding correction. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah. Also understand these people who the Israelites were defeating in battle, were from the same line of God's chosen people but had defected. It is well within God's right to take from them anything including their lives by any means He desires to fulfill His purpose. The Israelites were under specific direction from God to do these things. The time and place called for it as this type of power struggle and battle was the way of things then. God needed to establish the groundwork for His people, and this was a necessary step. What specific direction do we have from God today to do this to any group of people? *None*! Understand.

The wars didn't end there. The Israelites continued on and not only won the subsequent battles but at God's command they killed every person living in any of the land they moved through of that which had been promised to them. Understand God was cleaning the slate for them. He was removing all traces of those who had defected from His chosen people within the land. Although there was still more territory to take over, they had a time of peace, and the land was divided up and given to the tribes as their inheritance. At this point, Joshua dies and is buried. The people had brought Joseph's remains with them as Joseph had requested before his death and he was buried in the cave alongside Abraham, Isaac, and his father Jacob.

Evil unveiled

Despite their efforts to drive out the remaining peoples in the land, the Canaanites in particular gave them trouble, and they were not able to drive all of them out of the land so some Canaanites along with some from other tribes in the area lived among the Israelites. After the death of Joshua, a new generation of Israelites had come of age. They had forgotten the Lord, and all that God had done for them, and they allowed outside influence to corrupt them causing them to worship other gods. Because of this, the Lord allowed raiders to come and plunder the people. For any who know the text of the Bible, this is now at the start of the book of Judges. But we must interject here in order to understand the meaning of all things.

It is around this time when the story of Job takes place. Although the position on the timeline of this story has been greatly debated over the years, this is where it belongs! We can know this for several reasons. The story of Job talks about Sabeans plundering his household, and Chaldean raiding parties attacking his household. Both of these groups of people are known from our historical texts to have existed around the same timeframe as the judges in the promised land of the Israelites. Furthermore, we have just learned that God sent raiders to come and plunder the people. Christian church, why the debate? Furthermore, it has been claimed that Job is a figure meant to represent the Israelite people. Yet we know this to also be false as the Israelite people repeatedly fall away from God whereas Job never loses his faith! Understand! This is not to say Job does not represent something greater, as we will discover.

The story of Job begins by telling us that Job was a man fully devoted to the Lord and walked in all His ways. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan was with them. Bear in mind, this is the first mention of Satan in the text and timeline of the Bible at the same time the people are falling from God and God is sending raiders among them. So, here are the angels with Satan in front of God. God asks Satan where he came from, to which Satan responded that he was roaming through the Earth. God asks Satan if he has considered His servant Job saying that he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. Satan challenges God and says that Job is only this way because God has blessed him and his household. He suggests that God strike everything Job has, and Job will then curse God to His face. God accepts the challenge and tells Satan everything that Job has is now in his hands to do with as he pleases, but not to harm Job himself.

Now, Job's sons and daughters regularly gathered together and shared in feasts. One day while this was happening, a messenger came to Job and told him that a group of Sabeans came and took his oxen and donkeys and killed his servants. Then another messenger came and told him that fire of God came and destroyed his sheep and the servants with them. Still another messenger came and told him the Chaldeans came in three parties and took all his camels, killing the servants with them. And yet another messenger came and told him that his children were all feasting together at one of his son's houses when a mighty wind came from the desert and knocked the house down on them killing all of his children. What a terrible thing to have to endure! Job was devastated and grieved heavily. But he fell to the ground and worshipped God saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Even after losing everything, he still praised the Lord instead of saying God was wrong for allowing these things to be taken from him. It seems Satan was mistaken. But that's not the end of the story.

Again, the angels are gathered before the Lord and Satan was with them. God again asks Satan where he came from, and he responds that he was roaming through the Earth. God asks Satan if he has considered His servant Job saying that he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil and still maintains his integrity even after Satan incited God to bring him to ruin for no reason. To which Satan replies that a man will give all he has to protect his own life but if the man was struck by physical ailments, he would surely curse God to His face. God accepts this challenge also and says that Job is in Satan's hands, but that Satan is not allowed to take Job's life. So, Satan went and afflicted Job with painful sores from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. As Job sat there in the ashes that were left of his home, scratching at his sores with a piece of broken pottery which was once in his house, his wife who must have been just as upset, tells him to curse God for bringing this calamity on them. To which Job responds, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" Again, Satan was mistaken. Job did not relent from his faith!

Three of Job's friends come over to console him and, barely recognizing him from his affliction, they sit with him for seven days in silence until Job finally speaks to them. Think of a time when we have been devastated by something in our lives and

our friends attempted to console us. Job finally begins speaking to his friends and starts out by denouncing the day of his birth and wishing he had never been born so that this devastation on him would have been avoided. To which one of the friends replies that he must have done something wrong because God justly punishes those who deserve it. Job counters stating that he has not done anything to deserve this sort of punishment. He adds to this that it would be better for him if he was dead. Another of his friends states that his children must have sinned and caused it. Job questions how he can dispute God, knowing that his children had not been deserving of death. After this, again his friend tells him that he must have secret sins, since no man is completely free from sin. However, Job defends himself again telling his friends that he already knows what they are saying to him, yet it does not change how he feels. He even goes on to tell them that he would defend himself in this same way to God. Again, his friend tells him that he must have something wicked in his actions for God to deal such a blow to him. Job asks why his friends try to comfort him by denouncing him? He states that he does not deserve that. Now his friends grow frustrated that Job is questioning their wisdom in the matter and tell him that God only punishes the wicked. To which Job tells them to stop putting themselves above him. His friends now tell him since he had many belongings and was considered a man of wealth, that the wealthy must be wicked by their wealth alone. To which Job tells them how none of his wealth or belongings were obtained in any wicked way. Then his friends point out to him that perhaps he did not give enough to the needy when he had so much. Job also defends himself against this comment, stating he had given to the needy. At this point he tells his friends that he needs God to tell him the reason for his punishment, but he does not know where to find God to ask. Now his friends tell him that all men are wicked therefore he must be deserving of the punishment. Job tells them that he will stand firm on his righteousness. He shares with them a quote from God, “The fear of the Lord- that is wisdom, and to shun evil is *understanding*.”

Up to this point his three friends had been speaking to him. But there was another there, a fourth who was a younger man named Elihu and in following the custom of that time, the youngest should not speak before the elders are done. So, he had been waiting and since the others stopped their back and forth, he spoke up. The story did not tell us this young man was there until now, yet it gives some testimony of who he was. He says that he understands Job’s frustration with his friends and that they are condemning him without reason. He also understands that Job is justifying himself

rather than God. He questions how can we know God's purpose? At this point, after this new mysterious fourth friend who was younger than them all and yet speaks true wisdom to them all, God comes and asks Job who he thinks he is to contend with God. Stating that Job is not the one who created everything. Job tells God that he was contending with Him, but will no more, he shows his remorse. God further challenges Job saying Job would condemn God to justify himself. If Job is so mighty, he should show God how powerful he is. This challenge goes on into detail of two great beasts, one from the Earth and one from the sea.

Here is another topic of great debate. Much mystery surrounds these two creatures in the Bible. The Christian church ignores the existence of these descriptions and rather than teaching the meaning of these beasts, it is written off as one of God's many mysteries. Stop doing this! Understand! Before we try to understand the meaning, we need to first understand the state of things in the world at the time God spoke to Job. For thousands of years, the people of Earth had been nomadic, living in tents and farming the land for their survival. We learned how some groups of people were starting to build cities and even large civilizations such as the Egyptians had. However, this was not "the normal" around the world. These were only some groups of people. The rest were still living as the people had for so many generations, moving their tents around and farming for their food. This was the case with Job. He had a home and belongings, but it is evident from the herds and flocks he had, that his household was built up by working the land. Of course, we know now from our historical records that this is around the time all people started discovering they could have central cities where people could come and trade their goods, and in so doing there was now an opportunity for people to live within the city offering their various services to others in exchange for food. No longer was everyone going to have to farm for their own food. Understand this monumental change. It goes hand in hand with the development of technologies.

God describes His Behemoth or the beast from the Earth. He tells Job this creature was made along with us during the creation of all things. He also states it ranks first among the works of God. He states that the hills bring produce to the beast and the wild animals play nearby. He also says the beast can lay hidden among the reeds in the marsh, and that it does not fear the raging river. This is the version of the beast from the Earth fitting for the timeline of Job, the time when the Israelites are just

coming into the promised land and figuring out how to live rightly in it. This beast is the ability mankind has to create technologies. It was created alongside us, ranks first among the works of God. Understand this, God gave us the ability to create these technologies. When it is said that the hills bring it produce, we must understand that it was the discovery of technologies which allowed farming to provide enough to be traded and bartered for other services, those other services also stemming from new technologies. The beast can lie hidden among the reeds, meaning we don't always see the new technologies coming, but they reveal themselves repeatedly as we know well in our time. Not fearing the raging river is critical in our understanding as the technologies and knowledge needed to divert water into and out of the cities which were being raised were a critical part of this development. We are the empowerment of the beast from the Earth; without us, it would not be.

The other creature God describes is the Leviathan, the great beast from the sea. The first thing we must understand is that in those days the sea was representative of the peoples as a whole, in other words all of us. So, this beast comes from the people. God gives a daunting description of this beast as having shields on its back, snorting out flashes of light, fire coming from its mouth, smoke from its nostrils, and He says the mighty run from it and its undersides are like broken pieces of pottery leaving a trail in the mud as it stirs up the sea. Lastly it is described as the king over all that are proud. This beast represents that transition from the life of each farming for themselves, to the new way of life coming from the people, this new form of civilization, living in cities and most of all stirring up the peoples. Think about it this way, imagine being a simple farmer who has to work hard from morning to night caring for your own family and seeing this new way of life as an opportunity to live what appears to be an easier way of life and therefore seems better to us. Now consider the description with its back covered in shields that cannot be penetrated. Imagine looking at the massive walls of the city. Flashes of light come from our cities, fire is constantly burning somewhere within, smoke rises from chimneys, and even the mightiest of the farmers fear the collective of the city. It is certainly king over all that are proud. How can this ideology be encapsulated into one descriptive word? Can we call it society? Can we call it civilization? Its meaning goes deeper than one word can symbolize. The Leviathan is our method to reach this *understanding*. It is God's creation intended to serve His purpose here. Later in the book of Revelation, in the revelation of Jesus Christ, we learn that these two beasts become corrupted by Satan. Isn't it logical that God would

explain these things at the time of Job, as He is justifying Himself through His servant Job to Satan? A time for everything. That was a time for introduction and teaching, now is the time for *understanding*!

After God tells Job about these things, Job repents and despises himself admitting to God that he spoke of things he did not understand. Job's response to God in all of this was one of humility and respect. However, God was not so pleased with Job's three friends, telling them they did not speak of God what is right like Job did, meaning Job was right to defend himself against them since in doing so, he was still humbling himself before God and repenting of his rebellion of heart. God tells the three friends to offer a sacrifice and have Job pray for their forgiveness. Which Job does and after this encounter, Job is healed, and he goes on to have even more belongings than he had before. He also has three more children taking the place of those he lost. The story doesn't tell us anymore about the encounters between Satan and God, nor does it mention again that fourth friend, Elihu, who spoke to Job explaining that we do not know God's purpose. But let's put this together. Elihu says we do not know God's purpose, then God tells of how He created everything and how these two beasts are under His control, those of mankind's technologies and culture change. And all this as an answer to Job's probing of God's motive in allowing Job to be so devastated. It comes down to this, although terrible things may happen to us without apparent justification, they are taking place as a part of God's plan and purpose. Even the beasts whom we are intimately intertwined with and who couple themselves to Satan, are part of God's purpose. Evil now has a name. But God is not evil! He is teaching us good and evil. This is important! We still need to understand what that purpose is.

The need for leadership?

We are now back to the group of Israelites following the death of Joshua. There were still groups of other people living on the land, and although the Israelites tried to drive the others out, they were unable to. They had turned from God and started to worship the gods of the other cultures around them. The Lord raised up judges who would be there to guide the people. Each judge would help the people overcome a certain group of outsiders and yet after each of these apparent victories, the people grew even more wicked than the previous generation. God tells the people that since they keep reverting to the worship of other gods, He would not drive the other people out of the land and instead would cause them to remain as a test for God's chosen people. The cycle appears, obedience brings peace, forgetfulness brings bondage, and mercy will restore them.

It is important to understand the state of the people here. There was no king, no central form of government over the people. Everyone was free to do as they pleased. When *understanding* departs, everyone becomes their own law. The judges God put in place were to help ensure God's people were not completely destroyed by any of the remaining groups in the area. There were some people who still held fast to God's teachings, but there were others who had converted to worshipping other gods. The people were torn. In this, there was also a group of people who felt the need to have a single leader who could keep all the Israelites consistent on their path. Each judge served their purpose saving that generation from calamity, and after each generation, the people continued to all do as they pleased falling further from walking in God's ways each time. After several judges, and several generations pass, we are told the story of Samson.

At that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel. Samson's parents receive a visit from the angel of the Lord telling them they will have a son who has been chosen by God to serve as a Levite his whole life. This means he will be a servant of the Lord, sharing the Lord's message in his life. When Samson is of age, he requests his parents get him a wife from the Philistines. They do. One day as Samson is walking along on his way to pick up his wife and bring her home, he is confronted by a lion which he rips apart with his bare hands. Samson was clearly a very strong man. On his return journey, the carcass of the lion is filled with bees and honey. Samson eats some of the honey and brings some to his parents as well. Samson, however, did not pick his wife

from the Philistines without purpose. He offers a group of thirty Philistines a riddle. If they can solve it, he says he will give them thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes and if not, they must give that to him. “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.” Obviously, this is an unsolvable riddle for them. No one could have known what Samson was referring to. No one saw him kill the lion and no one saw him eat the honey from it. Even the honey he gave his parents; he did not tell them came from the lion. He had set them up. Of course, they were unable to solve it, yet they beseeched his Philistine wife to tell them the answer. She too didn’t know it, but after seven days of crying to Samson about it, he told her the answer. When the thirty men gave Samson the answer to his riddle, he knew that answer could only have come from one place. Therefore, he struck down thirty men from Ashkelon, a Philistine city, and gave their garments and clothing to the thirty men he challenged with the riddle. And at that, he left his wife and everything behind.

Later when Samson returned to see his wife, her father would not let him and advised Samson that he gave Samson’s wife to another man. This infuriated Samson. In response, he gathered up three-hundred foxes and tied their tails together two by two. He then lit the ends of torches he affixed to their tails and released them in the grain fields and vineyards of the Philistines burning up all of their crops. In return for this, the Philistine’s burned his wife’s father’s land down killing his wife and her father as well.

When news of all this reached the Israelites, a group of them approached Samson grumbling to him that since the Philistines ruled over them, he was bringing suffering down on them by battling against the Philistines. Therefore, they intended to tie him up and deliver him to the Philistines. This is the same trouble Jesus would later face. Samson agreed as long as they would not kill him themselves. They tied him up with two new ropes and led him down the road. On the way, a group of Philistines approached, and Samson broke the ropes holding him, and using a jawbone from a donkey, he struck down and killed a thousand men.

Then Samson had a new wife named Delilah. Again, the Philistines wanted to kill Samson but since he was so powerful, they had not been able to. They made a deal with Delilah that she would find out what gave him his strength so they could kill him. She spent several nights trying to find out what gave Samson his strength. He toyed

with her and gave her several different false ways to take his strength, each of them did not work. But finally, as he had with his previous wife, he gave in and told her that if his head were ever shaved, it would take his power away. This time, she deceitfully has his head shaved and sure enough when the Philistines come in to capture him, they are able to. His power had left him. They bound him and cut out his eyes, throwing him in prison and making him work manual labor. They would bring him out occasionally, to entertain themselves. His hair had begun growing back and his strength was growing again. One day there was a large gathering of thousands of Philistines who all came to be entertained. They filled a large temple with about three thousand men and women including the Philistine leaders. When Samson came out to entertain them, he had someone help him to the main pillar of the temple since he could not see it without his eyes. They placed him near it and placing one hand on one pillar and the other hand on another, Samson prayed to God to give him strength one more time and he pushed with all his might. The pillars gave way and the whole temple fell in on itself killing all who were there including Samson himself.

How do we understand this story? Think of Job. In a similar way, Samson lost everything he had in life. Both his wives were taken away by treachery, he never seemed to have a home to call his own, his eyes were cut out, he was imprisoned and humiliated. Yet as we learned through the story of Job, these trials are part of our purpose. God has a purpose in all things. Samson's purpose was to oppose the Philistines, and he walked in God's ways and served his purpose. Despite everything that was taken from him, even the power God had given him, he did not turn from his faith and therefore even in his death, he was accomplishing God's purpose for his life. It is clear, the stories from the time of the judges in Israel, are teaching us how to live in this new world where evil has now taken a name and a form and has now rooted itself in our society as a whole. Things are changing from the simple individual needs for food and water to a new societal need for strong leadership in order to protect the people. As always when there is the need for teaching, the need for a new way of thinking, God interjects to teach us what we need to know. The book of Judges mentions several times to us that the people of Israel had no king, and the people did as they saw fit. They had forgotten their God. In fact, at the end of the book of judges we learn it got so bad that the Israelites actually started fighting against each other as if they were enemies.

The time of the judges was drawing to a close and a new era was about to begin, but before that, we are told the story of Ruth. A woman and her husband moved from Bethlehem to Moab due to a shortage of food in the area. They lived in Moab and had two sons. As time went by, their sons married, one of them marrying a woman named Ruth. Eventually her husband and both her sons died, leaving the woman widowed with her two daughters in law. The famine had lifted in Israel, so the widowed woman decided to move back to Bethlehem and told her daughters in law to go back to their families in Moab. Ruth, however, did not want to leave the woman's side and decided to go with her to Israel. When they arrived, the people in the area knew the widow and welcomed her back into the land. Ruth lived with her and began working in the field of a relative of the woman. Despite the fact that Ruth was a foreigner, Boaz, the man who owned the field where she worked, knew of all Ruth had done for his widowed family member and therefore found favor in her. He allowed her to continue working there. It seemed right for Ruth to find a husband in the land, and Boaz was an obvious choice. Understand the husband who died in Moab could not carry on the family name since his sons died as well. Therefore, the only way to preserve the family name was to have it redeemed through the marriage of Ruth with one from the community. Boaz decides to marry Ruth in order to redeem the family name. This turns out to be the family lineage leading to king David and eventually to Jesus. In fact, Boaz would be King David's grandfather.

The understanding we must take from this story is firstly; we should care for the widowed. They have been through a great loss in their life and have no one to comfort them. Ruth showed her compassion for the widowed and was blessed for it. Secondly, the people had been told repeatedly to expel all others from the area, for example the Moabites, yet Boaz allowed Ruth to stay. Even the laws and rules need to be circumvented at times to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. Boaz accepted her and married her, and this is a mighty example of a person turning from the other gods to the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! There is the difference. The people needed not to drive out the people of different cultures and beliefs, but rather the gods they worshipped. Since Ruth was willing to devote herself to the God of Israel, they were doing right by the Lord. And lastly, we can understand from this story that God will not let His plan fail! After the death of the woman's husband and two sons, God did not let the family lineage die there. His plan, always in motion.

The Israelites continued to struggle with keeping the people devoted to God. The Levites were the clan responsible to serve as priests. This continued up to this point in the story. The lead of this clan of priests and the current leader of the Israelites was Eli. His sons however were falling away from God and taking advantage of people's sacrifices by consuming more than was set apart for them and taking it in ways they should not have. In addition to this they had been sleeping with the women who also served in front of the tent. This was of course the tent which housed the ark of the covenant. Because of their sinful ways, God tells them that this line of priesthood would no longer stand. The Lord tells them that although He had stated their house would minister before Him forever, no longer would that be the case saying, "Those who honor me, I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained." God tells them that He will raise up a faithful priest who will do right by Him. Of course, this is an early reference to Jesus.

The people are being attacked by the Philistines and in one of the raids, the Israelites lose the battle, and the ark of the covenant is taken from them. In the hands of the Philistines, the ark causes them to have one hardship after another to the point they decide to send it back to the Israelites. The ark is returned to the Israelites, and they call for the Levites to come and return it to its proper place.

During this time, a boy was born named Samuel. His mother had trouble conceiving and after praying to God for a child and promising to devote that child to the Lord, God blessed her with the birth of a son, Samuel. She kept her promise to God and after Samuel was weaned from her, she took him to Eli the leader and explained to him her promise to God asking him to take Samuel into the priesthood so that his life would be devoted to God. Eli takes the boy in and since the woman had kept her promise to God, she has several more children and lives well, able to come and see her son Samuel at least once a year. Samuel grew up well learning the ways of the priesthood. He became a respected advisor to the people.

Samuel advised the people to turn from the gods they were worshipping, the gods of the Philistines and to commit their hearts to the Lord. At that time, he became the leader of the Israelite people. Samuel devoted his life to removing the Philistines from the land of the Israelites. The people were successful under his leadership in driving the Philistines out. When Samuel grew to be very old, he appointed his sons as judge

over the people, but his sons had fallen away from God and because of this, the people went to Samuel and asked him to appoint a king over them like all the other nations had. Samuel was disheartened by this and sought the advice of the Lord. God told Samuel it was not Samuel the people were rejecting, rather it was God they were rejecting as their king, and they had been since He had saved them from Egypt. God tells Samuel to listen to the people and give them what they want but to warn them what the king they desire will do to them. “He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some, he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day.” Does this sound familiar? God gave them what they wanted to show them the cost of misplaced desire, the difference between guidance and control. Have we learned this lesson yet?

The faithless king

The people were unchanged and demanded a king. Samuel at first sends the people home so that he can consult with God to determine who to appoint as king. God tells Samuel who it will be. There is a man from the Benjamite tribe, which was the smallest in population of the tribes of Israel, whose name was Saul. He was a large man standing a head above all others. As the man, Saul, is out looking for some donkeys one day, he goes in to see Samuel to ask him for guidance in finding the donkeys. Samuel, at God's direction, already knew this was the man he would appoint as king. He tells Saul about it and sends him on his way for now. When the time comes, about a week later, Samuel has the Israelite assembly gather, and there he appoints Saul as the leader of the people. Saul was so unprepared to be appointed as king that during this gathering, he was found hiding among a pile of bags. It wasn't just Saul who had reservations against his appointment, there were some of the Israelites who also questioned this. Nevertheless, everything according to God's plan.

Shortly after his appointment as king, a group of Israelites are under siege from the Ammonites. They call on Saul for help. Saul threatens all of the Israelites by sending them pieces of oxen as a sign of what will happen to anyone who does not go and fight with them against the Ammonites. The people turn out in large numbers, over three hundred thousand soldiers. They are successful in defeating the Ammonites and in so doing Saul won the favor of the people. Despite the victory, Samuel begins to see signs that Saul may not be as fully committed to God as they hoped. In fact, he was not wrong. God calls for Saul to gather the army and attack the Amalekites giving specific instructions to Saul that he is to kill every living thing among the group of Amalekites. Saul leads a successful campaign, and they are victorious in the battle. However, Saul does not follow God's commands and instead of killing every living thing, he takes a plunder of cattle and sheep and brings them back to the Israelite people. For this reason, God regrets appointing Saul as king over His people. Samuel tells Saul that he will no longer be the king, and another will be appointed. It is true that God does not fear correction. Just because we are chosen by God to accomplish a task, if we do not walk in all His ways and follow His command, with His great power He can correct the path of His purpose, He does not change His mind. Although we know God intends for us to preserve life, we must remember that God is the keeper of all true life. If He told Saul to kill the animals, then we can trust that God would tend to the

true life of each of those animals. We must trust His purpose in this. Saul did not have that faith.

God speaks to Samuel and tells him to go to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem where he will find a new person to appoint as king. Samuel has Jesse bring his children in front of him so God can tell him which of Jesse's sons will be king. Each son presents themselves to Samuel and the last one to present themselves, the youngest son is chosen, David. When Samuel anoints David, the spirit of the Lord leaves Saul and enters David. David's anointing shows us that understanding begins in humility, not power, but faith. Meanwhile Saul, having lost the spirit of the Lord, is being tormented by an evil spirit of the Lord. His attendants, in an effort to help him, suggest that he should find someone who plays music well to calm him when he is being tormented by this spirit. They tell Saul there is a boy in Bethlehem who plays music well and is a brave boy. This boy is David. So, Saul beseeches Jesse to send him his son David to serve Saul. Jesse agrees and sends David to enter into Saul's service. David is well received and becomes Saul's armor bearer. Whenever the evil spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, David would play his music, and it would soothe Saul, and the evil spirit would leave him. Understand the meaning of the evil spirit of the Lord. Why does this remain without understanding, Christian church? Have we not already learned of the beast from the Earth, and the beast from the sea? Have we not understood these things also come from God? Everything for a purpose which we are trying to understand. We all know someone, whether in our immediate peer group or family, or someone we have heard stories about, who has been afflicted by the evil spirit of the Lord. Those who act wickedly and in defense of those actions say they do not know why they did it. If we are each honest with ourselves, we can remember a time in our lives when we have felt this same terror. We acted wickedly without understanding why we did. Even so small as a statement made in frustration which causes harm to others. How much better for us if we have someone who can help us still this behavior. Someone to calm the evil spirit of the Lord and return our hearts to the goodness God wants us to see. And how much better it is when we are returned to that goodness before we perform any wicked act rather than after.

The violent king

Now the Philistines had assembled and come out to battle the Israelites. The Philistines were on one hill, and the Israelites were on the opposite hill with an open valley between them. The Philistines had a champion named Goliath who was over nine feet tall and wore an armored bronze coat weighing over a hundred pounds. Every morning Goliath would come to the front of the Philistine ranks and call out to the Israelites to send one man to fight him. The losing side would then be subject to the winning side. This call from Goliath happened every morning for forty days. David's eldest three brothers were in the ranks of the Israelites lined up for this battle. David, however, went back and forth between his service to Saul and helping his father in Bethlehem. His father sent him with some bread and roasted grain to see his brothers, give them the food, and make sure they were doing well. David arrived at the army front in the early morning as both armies were lining up again for battle as they had been each day. David greeted his brothers and delivered the food to them and heard the same shout from Goliath that morning. David began questioning the men in the army as to why none of them would go and fight this man. They informed him that the king had stated whoever is able to kill Goliath will be granted great wealth, one of Saul's daughters in marriage, and tax exemption for their family. Word of David's candor is brought to Saul, who in turn calls for David to come speak with him.

When David speaks with Saul, he tells him that he is willing to go out and fight Goliath. Saul at first denies his request since David is only a boy and Goliath is a trained warrior. However, David tells Saul about the many times a lion or bear had taken away one of his father's sheep and how David would track it down and kill it, redeeming the taken sheep. He explains to Saul how this man, Goliath, will be like one of those lions or bears and by the strength God has given him, will fall by his hand. Saul dressed David up in armor to prepare him for the fight. However, David was not used to wearing a soldier's armor, so he removed it and took only his staff, five smooth stones, and his slingshot. As David enters the battlefield, Goliath is moving toward him and calls curses down on him from the god Goliath follows. David responds to Goliath stating that he is fighting on the side of the Lord and all who were there would see that it is not with shield and spear that battles are won but with the Lord. David rushes toward Goliath placing one of the stones he brought with him into his slingshot and firing once, he hit Goliath in the center of his forehead, the stone sinking into the flesh. Goliath stumbled and fell from the blow, dead. David moved over Goliath,

picked up Goliath's oversized sword and cut his head off with it. The Philistines fled in terror and the Israelites pursued them, striking them down.

After his victory over Goliath, David had gained the respect of the Israelite people. The people started saying "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." This new love the people showed David caused Saul to become jealous. He no longer allowed David to return home to help his father. Saul would give David many tasks to handle, and David was successful in all he did, becoming a leader in the army. One day the evil spirit of the Lord was on Saul, and he hurled his spear at David, but missed. Then he gave David a thousand troops and sent him on many missions. Saul was hoping that the Philistines would kill David for him, but his plan failed as David was successful in all his campaigns.

David ends up marrying one of Saul's daughters as part of his reward for defeating Goliath. David also makes friends with Jonathan who was the eldest son of King Saul. Certainly, this inflated Saul's jealousy toward David. Saul again tries to kill David with his spear, but David eludes it and escapes. On the run now, and with Saul searching for him to kill him, David ends up getting the sword of Goliath to arm himself and a group of about four hundred join him. These were his brothers and other people from the community who were opposed to King Saul. David and his men continue to flee from Saul as they are being hunted. One day Saul goes into a cave to relieve himself and David along with his men are hiding deep in the cave. David has his opportunity to kill Saul here. But instead, David cuts a corner of Saul's robe off and lets him walk out of the cave. David then stands at the opening of the cave and confronts Saul, asking why Saul is so adamant about killing David, when clearly David means him no harm. He could have killed him, but did not because Saul was the appointed king, anointed by God. Saul calls a truce for the moment and returns home. David and his men return to a stronghold they had been staying in.

Some time passed. David and his men had moved into the desert area. David had taken two new wives, his first wife, the daughter of Saul, was given to another man after he fled from Saul. But now again, Saul discovered where David was and still full of jealousy, he goes out with his forces again to kill David. David goes into Saul's camp as he is sleeping and again has an opportunity to kill Saul. Still, David does not believe in killing one of God's anointed rulers. He understands that God will deal with Saul as

God sees fit. Rather than killing Saul, David takes the spear and water bottle that is on the ground next to Saul and leaves without a trace. After he got some distance from the sleeping men who were with Saul, David shouts out to them once again showing that he could have killed Saul but did not. Again, Saul calls a truce with him for the moment, and both return home. We must understand that although Saul had the evil spirit of the Lord on him, David still recognized it as a spirit of the Lord and trusted in God to do what is right toward God's purpose.

David decides if he flees to the land of the Philistines, Saul will call off his pursuit. This plan works and David and his group of now around six hundred men live in the land of the Philistines for over a year. While there, they go on raiding parties attacking the Geshurites, Girzites, and the Amalekites. When they would raid these people, they would kill everyone in the group so that none could say what David did, but David and his men would take their livestock and belongings as plunder. As David became well known among the Philistines, the leader of the Philistines was preparing to go and battle the Israelites. He asks David to join him in the battle and David agrees. Saul, hearing of this coming battle asks God to advise him regarding the matter, but he gets no response. Samuel had died during the course of Saul's hunt for David and Saul had driven out all other prophets or seers. But he finds one woman who is able to bring the dead up to consult them. Saul goes to her and asks her to speak with Samuel. Samuel appears to them which causes the woman to scream. Clearly this was the first time her summoning had worked or else she would not have been surprised by the appearance of Samuel. Samuel advises Saul that it is just as Samuel told him it would be. That God was going to take the kingdom from Saul and give it to David. Saul is filled with fear.

As the time for the battle draws near, a group of Philistine leaders go to their king and raise concerns that David will double cross them. Based on this concern, the king of the Philistines does not allow David and his men to fight with them and sends them back to their home in the land of the Philistines. David is disheartened at this, countering that he has done the Philistines no wrong since he has been with them, but he does as the king asked and returns home with his men. When they arrive at their home in the land of the Philistines, they find that their home has been attacked by a group of Amalekites and all of their wives and children have been taken hostage. Surely David is starting to feel similar to Job in that everything in his life seems to be against

him. He was sent to serve Saul as a young boy, then despised and hunted by Saul, made to live as a fugitive in a foreign land, rejected by those people as well, and now losing his home and family. David consults with God who tells him to chase down the raiding party, and they will get their families back. So, he musters his men, and they head out to hunt down the group of Amalekites. Along the way a group of about two hundred of David's men are too weary to continue, so they set camp while the remaining four hundred continue. They catch up to the Amalekites and are victorious in defeating them, leaving none of them alive, saving their wives and children, and taking much plunder from the victory. On the way back, a group of the men refuse to give a share of the plunder to the two hundred men who stayed behind; however, David does not allow this. He tells them that everyone should share equally in the gifts God gives them. And this would be his way from this time on. He even sends portions of the plunder to everyone who helped them during their flight from Saul.

Meanwhile the battle took place between the Philistines and the Israelites. The Philistines won the battle and during the course of it, their archers wounded Saul. The Philistines also killed Saul's sons through the course of the battle including David's friend Jonathan. Saul fled after being injured and in his disgrace, he fell on his own sword, killing himself intentionally. When David hears of the death of Saul and Jonathan, he mourns greatly. This shows us David is not pleased that his hunter is dead, instead he is grieved that the Lord's anointed was killed and at losing his dear friend. David ends up moving into the land of Judah with his followers and their families. He becomes king over Judah, and during that same time, one of Saul's surviving sons, Ish-Bosheth, becomes the king over the rest of Israel.

There is a long-lasting battle between David and the house of Saul. Over the course of time, David grows stronger and gains the respect of the people. Groups of Israelites help David's cause by killing the leaders of Saul's house including Ish-Bosheth. David however does not commend these groups for killing these leaders from Saul's house. Instead, he punishes them for killing the Lord's anointed leaders saying that the blood of Saul's house will be on their head and not his as he gave no orders for these killings to take place. Yet, in the end, David is chosen to be the king of all Israel for the following thirty-three years.

David accomplishes much as king over Israel. He had his wife, the daughter of Saul who had been taken from him by Saul, brought back to him. He attacks and defeats the Jebusites who had taken over Jerusalem. He is then gifted a palace which is built for him. He brings the ark of the covenant up from its hiding place and has it brought to Jerusalem. As the ark is carried into Jerusalem, David is leading the parade, dancing, and singing with all his might, even stripping off his robe in celebration before the Lord. His wife, who was Saul's daughter, sees him acting this way through her window and despises him for it. She later tells him how foolish she thought he looked disrobing in front of all the people. David reassures her that it was God he was celebrating in front of, not the people. She never bore any children in her life. Yet, he had several other wives who bore him many children. It's clear that David had Saul's daughter, his wife, returned to him so he would not break his vow of marriage before the Lord despite her continued persecution of him.

The ark was brought up, yet it remained in the tent. David had it in his heart to build a temple to house the ark, but God tells him that it will be David's son who will build a temple for God, and the line of David's family will endure forever before God. This promise shows that some *understanding* is meant to be prepared in one generation and completed in the next. God also tells him that if David's son does wrong, God will punish him by the whips of men, God will not leave him the way He left Saul. Understand this, God put the evil spirit of the Lord on Saul, this is what He is saying He will not do to David's son, yet it does not mean that David's son can do no wrong. This is important. It simply means the spirit of the Lord will not leave him.

David led the people in many battles, always finding victory. He defeated Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and subjected the Edomites. It is important to reach an understanding of this. We have been learning that the Israelites seem to have been in constant warfare with the other nations. Understand the time and circumstance. All nations were battling all nations in those days. All things according to God's plan. It was necessary for the Israelites to fight in this way. It was the means to glorifying God's name among all people. But we must understand God is not seeking this glory for the sake of vanity. He is not lifting His own name as a ruthless king would, instead, He is lifting His name by laying low those whose actions were wicked. God was showing all nations that He is to be feared if our actions are wicked, but He is to be praised if our actions are righteous. It was the only way to establish His

people in that time and circumstance. We must always be aware of the time and circumstance. We are *not* in a time for war today. This is a time for *understanding*!

David was not perfect in his actions. One day he saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba and wanted to have her for his wife, however she was a married woman. David found out who her husband was and had the man sent to the front line on the battlefield where he knew the man would likely be killed. During the battle, the man is killed. After Bathsheba has her time of mourning the loss of her husband, David has her brought to him and he makes her his wife. This clearly upset the Lord, but God shows compassion to David and rather than taking David's life, He tells David that his life will always be by the sword, and that one of his sons will sleep with all of his concubines, and God takes the life of the firstborn from Bathsheba and David. David praises God for sparing him and eventually Bathsheba gives birth to a son for David named Solomon.

However, God always keeps His promise even a promise of punishment to come. One of David's sons desires the sister of Absalom, one of his brothers. Note these siblings have the same father but different mothers so in today's age we would call them half-brothers or half-sisters. His sister, however, does not want to be with him. He tricks her and rapes her. Afterward he despises her, and his brother Absalom is enraged at him and plots a scheme to kill him. The scheme works and Absalom kills him. David exiles his son Absalom for doing this but later allows him to return to the land at the coaxing of his advisor. Absalom returns and now plots a scheme to overthrow the throne from David. Once again David has to run for his life and goes into hiding in the land. As David is hiding from his son who is now trying to have him killed, Absalom goes to David's palace and sleeps with all his concubines thereby administering God's punishment on David.

Eventually Absalom meets up with David, both having armies with them. They engage in a bloody battle. David's forces are victorious and Absalom, during the battle, is caught up in a tree and killed despite David's command that the men protect Absalom. Clearly David still loved his son, even though his son was trying to kill him and overthrow his throne. David mourns the loss of his son so much that he discredits the victory they had that day. Once David and his men return, the land of Judah is the first to welcome him back as king while the rest of Israel is still debating if David should

resume the kingship or not. Then once Israel decides to bring him back as the king, there is a dispute between the land of Judah and the rest of Israel as to who should be the first to bring the king back. This rivalry between the land of Judah and the rest of Israel is now showing itself but worsens over the course of time. They are starting to become a divided house.

David settles the dispute among the people by killing those who were opposing him as king. After he is back on the throne over all Israel, he calls for a census to be done through all the land. After completing the census there are over a million able bodied soldiers in their kingdom. David realizes the lack of faith behind this count. Why should they have had to count when they already knew the great number of them there were, and knowing God was with them? Realizing this lack of faith, David seeks the Lord's forgiveness. God calls for a punishment for this, and a plague is called down on the people killing over seventy thousand of them before God lifts it.

The unsatiable king

When David is very old and in failing health, at the risk of losing the kingdom and on the advice of those close to him, David appoints his son Solomon to be the king. Solomon is the son David had with Bathsheba who was the woman whose husband David had killed in battle so that he could take her for himself. Shortly after appointing his son Solomon as king, David died and was buried.

Solomon started his time as king by removing some leaders from their positions, killing some who had done wrong under his father's reign, and establishing the throne as his now, rather than David's. Think of this in a similar way to how our elected officials will choose the cabinet of advisors they want to have around them. A changing of the guard so to speak. Not only did Solomon establish his throne among the people, but he also made a sacrifice to the Lord asking for wisdom to discern good judgement as king over the people. God was pleased with Solomon and recognizing that Solomon didn't ask for wealth or longevity, instead asking for wisdom, God granted Solomon's request and gave him a wise and discerning heart. Solomon's request fulfills the pattern- wisdom as the first creation now returns as the highest gift.

Some would say Solomon had it easy as the king of Israel. After the many battles fought and won by his father David, the land came to a time of peace. The people settled into their homes and under Solomon's wise rule, they flourished. People from surrounding nations would even come and listen to Solomon speak his words of wisdom, his many thousands of proverbs, and over a thousand songs. Since the land was at peace, and Solomon was making treaties with the neighboring peoples, he was able to secure the workers and materials needed to build a temple to house the ark of the covenant which to this point in time had still been housed in the original tent constructed under Moses' care in the desert. The building of the temple began in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt.

Solomon spent seven years building the temple for the Lord. Its design was similar in function to the tent, however it was set on a stone foundation and adorned beautifully using wood and gold plating. The innermost chamber was up two sets of stairs which is where the ark was to be placed. He had two large cherubim crafted to cover the ark within that room. The temple was adorned with gold chains and carvings of natural trees and flowers. It took thirty thousand workers seven years to complete it.

However, it took Solomon thirteen years to build his palace which was made up of multiple buildings even larger than the temple he built for the Lord. The story doesn't go into detail of this difference between the temple built for the Lord and the palace built for Solomon. In fact, it only gives one minor intonation. Immediately following the description of the amount of time it took to build the temple, it says, "He spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." That one intonation we get from the combination of these two passages and the use of the word "however" gives us insight into the way we should view Solomon. He is showing that his focus was on his own wealth and standing more than it was on building up God's position as leader of the people.

Regardless, Solomon completed the construction of the temple and all the adorning artifacts to go in it. He followed closely the same basic pattern of the original tent which housed the ark. He built a bath, an altar for offerings, tables, cups, bowls, along with other furnishings. It would have been an awe-inspiring sight for any who had the honor of seeing it. But let's not misunderstand this. Just as we discovered when we learned about the original tent which housed the ark, the beautiful adornment is not what God demands from the people. It was about being clean in our spirits. Its design again does not speak only to the people of that time, but to us today. The innermost, or most holy chamber which housed the ark was protected by the cherubim and in order to reach it, one would have to go through the process of cleansing one's spirit first. The bath for cleaning the exterior of ourselves, the sacrifice offering to clean the interior of ourselves, the journey led by the light of the lampstands leading us to the innermost chamber, the holy place where we know that by following the commandments and walking in God's way, we are able to reach God in that holy place. Many of us today still follow this line of thinking. We adorn our churches in similar fashion with the most holy place being the sanctuary inside each church. This was not the meaning, but our efforts were also not in vain. The full understanding of the temple has not yet been revealed to us. But God was pleased with the temple built under the command of Solomon and His cloud, which had traveled with the ark for so many years, settled in place in the innermost chamber of the temple. God was with His people.

During the dedication of the temple, Solomon speaks to all the Israelites in prayer. In that prayer Solomon asks God to hear the prayers of any who pray toward God's

temple. He includes the prayers of those who do not live in the land, but that pray in the direction of the temple, that God will hear their prayer and have mercy on them whatever their circumstance is as long as they are devoted to the Lord and pray in the direction of the temple. This too is misunderstood in our time. There are still those who feel the need to pray in the compass direction of a temple which no longer stands. Understand, this later is changed through Jesus. We cannot pray toward something which is not there. In our time, there is a different temple, a metaphysical temple. God also warns Solomon with a foretelling of what will come. He tells Solomon that although the temple is seen as something to be feared at the time of its dedication, if the people do not follow God's decrees and walk in all of His ways, then the temple will be cut off and destroyed. God tells him that people will ask how God could cause such calamity to the temple of His own name and the answer will be that it is because the people turned from God. Understand.

Solomon continued the building projects throughout the land. Since the land was in a time of peace, he was building them up as much as possible. Cities were restored and rebuilt after being demolished in the many battles from their recent history. In fact, word of his great wisdom and the growth of their wealth reached far. The queen of Sheba hears of Solomon's successes and wisdom and comes to visit him showering him with gifts of gold, spices, and wood. Solomon sends her home with gifts which value even more than what she gave to him. It was clear the Israelites were amassing great wealth. Everything a nation would have desired in those days; the Israelites had it. It was said that Solomon gained so much wealth for the Israelites that silver was as common as stones. It is written that Solomon's annual gold revenue was six hundred and sixty-six talents which is about twenty-five tons, or fifty thousand pounds each year. In today's time, that is 1.25 billion dollars a year just in gold revenue. This amount of gold revenue six hundred and sixty-six is a haunting prophesy as it relates to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Solomon not only amassed wealth for himself and the people, but he also amassed women in his life. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. They were from all the nations around Israel, those whom the Lord had told them not to intermarry with as they would lead the Lord's people to follow other gods. And these women did lead Solomon to follow other gods building temples to each for his wives and offering sacrifices in them. Division in the heart, as we will learn through the next

portion of the story, leads to division in the nation. We will see this inner disunity show outwardly. For this, God told Solomon that his kingdom would not endure. God tells him that for the sake of his father David, God would not rip the nation out from under Solomon but from under his son, He would tear the nation out leaving only one tribe. Sure enough, throughout the rest of Solomon's reign, the number of adversaries against him and the Israelites grew.

The unguided kings

Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials who started a rebellion against him. God told Jeroboam through a prophet, that He would give Jeroboam ten of the tribes to rule over, leaving one to be ruled over by Solomon's son, therefore keeping a line of David's descendants on a throne in Israel but ripping the rest of the nation away and giving it to Jeroboam. However, God tells Jeroboam that he must walk in all God's ways and if he does then the nation will become as great under his rule as it had under David's rule. Solomon tried to have Jeroboam killed but Jeroboam flees to Egypt until it is safe to return.

Now Rehoboam was Solomon's son and heir to the throne in Israel. After ruling Israel for forty years, another time of trial, Solomon died, and his son Rehoboam assumed the throne. The people brought their complaint to him stating that under the rule of his father Solomon, the people were tasked with a lot of work in rebuilding the cities and constructing the temple and palaces. They ask for Rehoboam to lighten this workload for them. Although his advisors suggest that he listen to the people and lighten the load on them, he instead listens to a group of his friends who encourage him to display his fierce power as their king and threaten to make their workload even greater. This helps fulfill God's plan to put Jeroboam in place as king over Israel. However, the house of Judah still held fast to Rehoboam, Solomon's son, as their king.

Jeroboam heard of the death of Solomon and returned from his hiding in Egypt. When he returned, he was welcomed back by those who had rebelled against Rehoboam and they appointed him king over all Israel, yet Judah stayed loyal to Rehoboam. Rehoboam gathered the army from Judah numbering over a hundred thousand fighting men, but when they sought God's advice regarding battling their brothers in Israel, God tells them not to go into battle with them, because this has been God's will. They follow God's command and do not go out to fight the rest of Israel.

God's chosen people were now divided. Yet we know this is not the first time God's chosen people were divided, was it? We have learned of the division of God's chosen people since the story of Cain and Abel. We have pointed out how groups of people defect from God's chosen people consistently throughout the written history. Yet, everything according to God's plan. At each breakout of people, God gives instruction that

simply by returning to walking in all His ways, the people will be redeemed. In all history from that time until this modern day, we have not.

Jeroboam led the people to fall further away from God rather than walking in all His ways. He decided that if the people were going to go to the land of Judah to worship at the temple, they may decide to defect from his followers and become subjects to Rehoboam in Judah. In order to stop this from happening, he has two large golden calves put up and tells the people they can worship those calves rather than making the journey all the way to the land of Judah. Along with this he not only allowed the people to worship other gods in their temples, but he too engaged in this activity. For this reason, God told Jeroboam that the house of Jeroboam would be completely destroyed, and Israel would be uprooted from the land. Meanwhile Rehoboam wasn't managing too much better in Judah as the people were worshipping other gods there as well. It seems both groups were losing their faith and breaking the covenant with the Lord. During Rehoboam's reign in Judah, the Egyptians came out and attacked them taking plunder from the temple of the Lord. Rehoboam replaced as much as he could and eventually died, leaving his son Abijah to take the throne.

Despite the death of Rehoboam, the fighting continued between the house of Jeroboam and the house of Rehoboam throughout the reign of Abijah as did the peoples worshipping of other gods and after Abijah's death his son Asa assumed the throne in Judah. Two years after Asa took the throne in Judah, Jeroboam died in Israel and his son Nadab succeeded him as king in Israel. Nadab was only king for two years before he was killed in battle and the throne was passed on to Baasha who was the son of one of Nadab's advisors. With Baasha on the throne in Israel and Asa on the throne in Judah, there was war between the two parties. Israel had gained the support of the surrounding peoples and king Asa decided that in order to protect the people of Judah, he would have to get the supporters of Israel to stop aiding them in the war. He gathered up all of the treasure they had in Judah and sent it to Ben-Hadad the king of Aram asking him to stop helping the Israelites. They reached an agreement, and Judah was saved from the impending destruction. Sometime later, Baasha dies, and his son Elah takes the throne over Israel. Elah reigns for about two years before he is killed by one of his own officials Zimri who then takes over the throne. Zimri only reigned for seven days before his rebellion was crushed, and he killed himself with fire. Omri, the commander of the Israelite army was the one who was appointed king after him. Omri

also led the people to sin by worshipping other gods and after his death, his son Ahab becomes king over Israel.

Of kings and prophets

So now Asa is king of Judah still and Ahab is king of Israel. King Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the kings before him. He not only continued the practice of worshipping other gods, but he also married Jezebel who was the daughter of the king of the Sidonians and began to serve Baal and worship him. Now Elijah, who was a Tishbite from Gilead, was a prophet. To be clear, a prophet is one who speaks the truth of God's word. It is someone who has knowledge of the faith and at God's direction advises the people. They have been called seers and other such names because they are given the ability to see what is to come in the future. A prophet is not merely a predictor of events, but a messenger who calls the people to remember and return. God spoke to many through prophets over the course of time, but never in such a way as was about to start with Elijah.

God tells Elijah to speak to Ahab and tell him that there will be no rain or dew on the land for the next few years. Elijah does this and then at God's direction he goes into hiding where he is fed by ravens which delivered food to him. Again, let our faith be tested here. The next story tells us how the river he is hiding by dries up from the lack of rain and Elijah is sent into a village to stay with a widow there. While he is staying with her, her jars of flour and oil to make bread never run out. Her son also becomes ill and dies, and Elijah is able to bring him back to life! Elijah lays on top of the boy three times and pleads with God to return the boy's life to him. God does and the boy awakes alive again! At this, the widow proclaims that she now knows Elijah is certainly a man of God. But it is not for Elijah. It is not for the boy. It is not to save the boy's life, or to bring comfort to the mother! We must understand this is done to show that God is the true God, and these miracles give evidence to the people that the one performing the miracle is surely touched by God. God performs miracles, not for show or vanity, He performs them to bring witness to His existence. It is the evidence for the people there at the time of the miracle. There is a difference between coincidence and miracles. It is hard to say that a dead boy coming back to life is a coincidence. The question is, without this sign of miracles performed in our lives, can we still find the same faith? Can we choose to believe the stories are real? Find faith.

Ahab's wife Jezebel made it her mission to hunt down and kill all the prophets of the true God. Although she was having the Lord's prophets killed, she was, at the same time, amassing a group of her own prophets, those who worshipped Baal and Asherah.

Obadiah was the man in charge of Ahab's palace, and he was a devout believer in God. He had been secretly hiding one hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves. Since a drought had caused a famine in the land, Ahab called for Obadiah to help him search the land for areas of grass they could feed their livestock with. They split directions to search. God tells Elijah to go to Ahab and then God is going to allow rain to return to the land. On his way, Elijah happens to run into Obadiah. He explains that he is on his way to see Ahab, and Obadiah agrees to get Ahab so they can meet. Now this is no walk in the park for Elijah. He is the one who called the curse down on Ahab regarding the rain, of course at God's direction. So, it is not hard to understand how Elijah must have feared facing Ahab. When Elijah meets Ahab, he tells him to gather all the people and meet him on Mount Carmel. He also asks Ahab to make sure the prophets Jezebel had collected, those of Baal and Asherah, join them on the mountain.

Once they were all assembled on the mountain, Elijah spoke to the people saying, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is god, follow him." He further states that he is the only true prophet of God remaining and there are over four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal there. He challenges them to set up a sacrifice to their god, but not to light it and he would do the same. Then they would have to call on the name of Baal to start the fire, and he would call on the name of the Lord to do the same. His challenge is accepted, and the prophets of Baal set up their altar and begin calling on Baal to bring fire to it. They go on all day calling on Baal to start the fire, but to no avail. Elijah, meanwhile, is taunting them, suggesting that perhaps Baal is sleeping and just needs to be woken up, or perhaps he is traveling somewhere. When the time of the evening sacrifice came, their altar remained untouched by any flame. Elijah then has them come over to the altar he has prepared. In preparing it, he built it up in the Lord's name and even dug a trench around it. He called for the people to pour large jars of water on top of the altar. It was so much water that it filled the trench around it. Those of us who have started fires before, know how difficult it is to get a good fire to burn on anything that is wet let alone drenched in water. Then Elijah spoke asking God to let it be known that He is the Lord over Israel, and that Elijah is His servant. He asks God to let the people know that He is their God and that He is turning their hearts back again. And at that, the fire of the Lord fell and burned everything including the altar and the stones and even dried up the water in the trench. Then the people believed. Elijah then has the prophets seized and killed. Then he sent Ahab away to eat and drink telling him that

the rain would now return. At that, he climbed up on the mountain top and prayed to God. Then the rain returned.

When word got back to Jezebel of the death of her prophets, she was enraged and threatened to kill Elijah. Elijah fled feeling completely defeated. Understand, Elijah was a man of God surrounded all around by people who had turned from God. All the other prophets of God had been killed by Jezebel and Elijah was the only one left and now his life was being threatened. He was ready to give up. And he did not hold back from stating this very thing to God. Although surely God understood why Elijah felt this way, His purpose had not yet been fulfilled. God tells Elijah to go to mount Horeb also known as mount Sinai which was the same mountain Moses climbed to speak to God. When Elijah goes up the mountain, God causes a mighty wind to blow the mountain apart shattering the rocks, but God was not in it. Then God sends an earthquake, but He is not in the earthquake either. Then God sends a fire, but He is not in the fire. Finally, Elijah hears a soft whisper and at this, he puts his cloak over his head and stands at the entrance to the cave he was in on the mountain. Remember when God presented Himself to Moses, God told Moses that He would cover him until God had passed by and then allow Moses to see His back because men could not see the face of God and live. Elijah knew this and surely that is why he remained in the cave as the wind, earthquake, and fire passed and he knew the whisper was God. He also must have known that he could not see the face of God and live which must be why he covered his face when presenting himself to the Lord. And God must have been pleased with Elijah's actions as He spoke to Elijah there.

As stated, God understood Elijah's feeling of hopelessness. He tells Elijah to go back the way he came and to anoint Hazael as king over Aram, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha to succeed Elijah as prophet. God explains that Hazael will put the people to the sword. Jehu will kill any that escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Except, God tells Elijah that they will not kill all of the Israelites, that there will be seven thousand from Israel who had not worshipped Baal, and they would be reserved for the Lord.

Elijah set out and found Elisha who in turn rid himself of all his possessions and followed Elijah. Meanwhile, the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad who we know already had an alliance with Judah, had called for his troops to invade Israel, clearly the other

nations of the time were determined to overthrow others. They had gone from assisting the Israelites in their war against Judah to now waring against Israel. Despite God's counsel to Ahab, king of Israel, for him to attack and destroy the army of Aram, Ahab instead made a treaty with Ben-Hadad. Understand the treaty Asa made with Ben-Hadad did not go against any command of God, however God had commanded Ahab to destroy them. That is the difference. Adding to King Ahab's list of shameful actions, he also saw a vineyard he wanted to have for himself. To remove the current owner from it, his wife Jezebel devised a plan to have the owner of the vineyard falsely accused of cursing God and the king, and her plan is successful. The people stone the owner of the vineyard, killing him and allowing Ahab to take possession of it.

Because of this injustice, God tells Elijah to go to king Ahab and inform him that since he killed this man and took his vineyard, the dogs would lick up Ahab's blood in the same place they licked up the owner of the vineyard's blood. Furthermore, God tells Elijah to inform Ahab, God will destroy all his descendants and remove his family line from Israel. Adding one more punishment, regarding Jezebel, the Lord tells Elijah to state to Ahab that dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel which was the main fortress of Israel at the time. When Elijah tells Ahab all that God instructed him to, Ahab mourns greatly and humbles himself finally. Since Ahab finally relented to the Lord, God decides that instead of bringing the punishment down on Ahab now, He will wait and bring the punishment down during the days of Ahab's son's life. Remember God does not change, but He also is not shy of correction.

Around this time, Asa, the king of Judah dies, and his son Jehoshaphat had assumed the throne in Judah. Jehoshaphat did good in the eyes of the Lord for his first few years as king. He even sent some of his officials throughout the land with the book of the law which Moses had written, and he had them teach the people. During that time, he gained the people's respect. There was a short time of peace between Judah and Israel. Ahab, the king of Israel, was having some trouble because the Arameans were still in control of one of the Israelite cities which they felt the need to gain control over again. Ahab calls for Jehoshaphat to come and assist him in taking back the city. Jehoshaphat agrees to meet with him about it, and they look for prophets to consult as to whether or not God says they will be successful in the campaign. They call several prophets who all tell them God says they will be successful. However, Jehoshaphat

sees through these prophets and asks if there is another prophet of God who they can ask.

Ahab knew of one named Micaiah, but he was reluctant to call on Micaiah because every time he consulted Micaiah the response was not favorable toward him. But they call Micaiah in and ask him anyway. Micaiah first tells them the same as the other prophets did, that they would be successful, however, Ahab does not accept this because Micaiah had never given a favorable response to him. After asking Micaiah to be truthful with him, Micaiah then tells them the true answer, that he saw Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. He goes on to explain to the kings that he saw the Lord sitting on His throne with the host of heaven asking who would entice Ahab into attacking these people and therefore going to his death. One of the spirits volunteers to do it and in response to what method he will use, the spirit says he will put a lying spirit in all of the prophets to entice the king into it. God agrees this will work and sends him to do so. In response to what Micaiah told them, Ahab has him thrown into prison and refused food or water until they return safely. Micaiah states to them that will never happen.

Sure enough, king Ahab of Israel and king Jehoshaphat of Judah go out to fight the Arameans. Ahab, thinking only of saving himself, tells Jehoshaphat to wear his king's garb while Ahab goes in disguise as a regular soldier. The Aramean army, seeing Jehoshaphat in the king's garb chased him down during the battle. However, Jehoshaphat cries out to them telling them he is not the king of Israel. In the meantime, during the battle, Ahab is struck by a random archer and after riding on a chariot throughout the battle, he dies in a pool of blood. After the battle ended, Ahab's chariot was brought to Samaria, which is the land of Israel, to be washed in a pool where the prostitutes bathed. And there the dogs licked up his blood just as God had stated. His son Ahaziah succeeded him as king over Israel.

Jehoshaphat remained at peace with Israel during most of his reign in Judah. However, he did not stop the people from worshipping other gods and continued them on the same path. He was also scolded upon his return from the battle when a seer confronted him asking if he should help the wicked, stating because of this, the Lord was against him. Jehoshaphat appointed judges throughout the land and gave orders to the priests to ensure the people would not sin. When they came under threat from

the Moabites and Ammonites, Jehoshaphat prayed to the Lord for His help. God tells them to go to the place where the battle would be so that they can look out over it and not to be afraid. So, Jehoshaphat gathered the army and went to the lookout spot. By the time they arrived, God had already caused the attacking armies to turn on each other, therefore all they saw when they got there was the pile of bodies. They looted the camps and returned home causing fear to run through the rest of the neighboring nations. In this way, the land found peace for some time. Before his death Jehoshaphat made an alliance with king Ahaziah in Israel to construct a fleet of ships, however once again he was teaming up with the wicked and was reprimanded by another prophet saying because he had teamed up with a wicked leader again, God would destroy all he made. The ships were wrecked and never set sail. When he died Jehoram his son succeeded him. Ahaziah who now reigned in Israel also followed in the ways of his father and the people continued in their downward spiral.

One day Ahaziah fell and injured himself. He sent messengers to consult with Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron to find out if he would recover from his injuries. This of course is where our ties of Beelzebub as another name for Satan come from. Understand this is the god the Philistines worshipped. Surely it caused many hardships for God's people but know the difference between the human assumed god, Baal-Zebub and Satan. So far all we know of Satan is that he was in the host of heaven and challenged God, thinking that mankind loved God conditionally. There is a difference. Although the futile gods worshipped by the other nations represented wickedness to the people, Satan was obviously something else. What we can understand from this is that the challenge between God and Satan was not limited to just the story of Job. It is something much deeper which takes insight and wisdom. God of course always gave insight into these things. In this case God told Elijah to go out and meet these messengers on their way to consult Baal-Zebub. God tells Elijah to state to them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'"

When the men returned to king Ahaziah, they told him what Elijah reported from God. Upon hearing that this message came from Elijah, Ahaziah sends a group of fifty men to bring Elijah back with them. When the men arrive, they call for Elijah to come down to them, but instead Elijah calls fire down on them and they are destroyed by it.

The same happens to the next fifty men the king sent. When the third group of fifty arrives, the leader of that group begs Elijah to spare his life. At this, God tells Elijah to go with the men to the king. Elijah does, and he himself tells the king the message God sent, and at that, the king died. Since Ahaziah had no sons, Joram succeeded him as king in Israel.

Elisha had continued his service alongside Elijah, and the time came for God to take Elijah. The text doesn't tell us how, but it states that Elijah, Elisha, and others knew about this day before it came. Elijah told Elisha several times to stay behind as he went ahead, but Elisha refused. It is evident that Elisha was determined to stay by Elijah's side even if that meant he would be taken with him. When they reached the Jordan river, Elijah struck it with his cloak, and the waters separated so they could cross over.

On the other side of the river, Elijah asks Elisha if there is anything he can do for him before he goes. To which Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah tells him that if Elisha sees him taken, then it will be so. Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them. Clearly God was not going to allow Elisha to follow anymore. Elijah then was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Then Elisha saw him no more and mourned greatly. The only thing remaining from Elijah was his cloak which had fallen to the ground when he was taken. Elisha picked it up and returned to the Jordan. He struck the water just as Elijah had and the water separated. Now the people who had been standing on the opposite bank of the river knew that the spirit of Elijah was with Elisha.

In addition to this sign showing God was with him, Elisha also called on God to turn bad water to good water for a group of people, and he called a curse down on a group of youths who were hurling insults at him. He also helped a widow who was struggling by filling her oil jars through a miracle of God so that she could pay her debts, and her sons could live off the sale of it. In addition to this, Elisha was also able to bring a young boy back to life for a family who had helped house and feed him. He did this using the same method we have already learned that was done by Elijah. On another occasion a group of people were suffering from famine, and Elisha gave instruction for them to make some stew to eat which they said they could not eat because it had death in it. Elisha added some flour to it and then it was edible. Another time,

a group of a hundred men only had twenty loaves of bread to eat and a few heads of grain. Elisha told them to pass the food out and although they didn't believe it was enough food, everyone ate and was full and there was food leftover. One more occasion Elisha was able to have God remove the leprosy from Naaman, the commander of the army of Aram and during this interaction, Elisha's assistant takes greedily from Naaman. For this reason, Elisha has God place the leprosy on his assistant. It seems God was with him both in glorifying God's name by showing His gracious miracles and in bringing the fear of the Lord by calling down curses on the wicked.

At this time Jehoshaphat was king in Judah and Joram was king in Israel. Since Ahab had a deal with Moab, when Moab learned of Ahab and Ahaziah's deaths, they broke the deal and rebelled against Israel. King Joram of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah to aid them in their campaign against Moab. The two of them joined together their armies and brought with them the army of Edom. Along the way they ended up running out of water and looking for a prophet to help guide them. They are told about Elisha and how he was an assistant to Elijah. They met up with Elisha who advised them that since the king of Judah was with them, he would help. He told them to dig trenches in the land and that God would provide them water. He also told them they would be successful in their campaign against Moab. Sure enough, the next morning water rushed in and filled the trenches. When the Moabites looked over at the camp, the water reflected to them with a red hue. They mistook this to be blood rather than water and thinking that the Israelites had all killed each other they came into the camp not prepared for battle but rather thinking they were just going to loot it. When they arrived at the camp, the Israelites rose up and fought them, overcoming them and defeating them, not only on that battlefield but in all the cities and land of the Israelites where the Moabites were.

Israel was also at war with the king of Aram. Elisha had been telling the king of Israel where the Arameans were so that the Israelites would avoid walking into a trap. This frustrated the king of Aram who sent a large force to find and kill Elisha. When the group sent for him was close to Elisha, Elisha called on the Lord to make the group go blind. Now that they were blinded Elisha fooled them into thinking he was bringing them to find the man they were looking for. Since they were blind, they did not know it was that man himself who was now leading them. Elisha led them into Samaria and lifted their blindness. The king of Israel wanted to kill the group of men, but Elisha

pointed out to him that they were prisoners now and they should instead feed them and send them back to their home. The king obliged and because of this action, Aram stopped raiding the Israelite territory.

Elisha's help was not always so concise. On one occasion, the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad was ill and sent one of his servants, Hazael, to consult with Elisha as to whether the king would recover from his illness. Elisha tells Hazael to inform the king that he will in fact recover, but Elisha also tells Hazael that the Lord has told him the king will not recover. And at that, Elisha began to weep. Hazael asks Elisha why he is weeping, and Elisha responds by saying he knows the harm Hazael will cause the Israelite people because the Lord has shown Elisha that Hazael will become king over Aram and bring death and destruction on the Israelites. When Hazael returns to King Ben-Hadad, he tells the king what Elisha told him to, that the king will surely recover. The next day, Hazael took a thick cloth soaked in water and suffocated the king, killing him and taking over the throne. It begs the question, if Elisha had not told Hazael about it, would Hazael still have killed Ben-Hadad? Again, everything according to God's plan.

Now Joram was the king in Israel and Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had taken over the throne in Judah. Jehoram led the people of Judah in the same way the Israelites were being led, worshipping other gods, and turning from the Lord. He established himself on the throne by killing all of his brothers. Elijah, before he was taken, had sent a letter to King Jehoram telling him that because of his wickedness, the Lord would strike his whole house with a heavy blow and that he would have a disease of the bowels which would cause them to come out. God also aroused the Philistines and the Arabs to raid and attack them, even taking his family from him except for his youngest son, Ahaziah. Yet for the sake of David, God was not going to relent on keeping Judah around. After some time, Jehoram died from bowel disease a horrible and painful death, and his son Ahaziah succeeded him as king in Judah.

Elisha knew there was unfinished business which the Lord had tasked Elijah with. As we learned Elijah was tasked with three things when he had been feeling hopeless. Appoint Elisha as prophet, Hazael as king over Aram, and Jehu as king over Israel. Elijah appointed Elisha as prophet. However, it ended up being Elisha who anointed Hazael as king over Aram as we just learned. One more action remained which was to anoint Jehu as king over Israel. Elisha decides to send one of the prophets who was

with him to find Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat. He sends this prophet with a flask of oil to anoint Jehu as the king of Israel. So, the man went and found Jehu and as Elisha had instructed him, he took Jehu aside and anointed him as king over Israel. He tells Jehu that Jehu is to destroy the house of Ahab and by doing so God will avenge the blood of His prophets which was shed by Jezebel, Ahab's wife. He also tells Jehu that Jezebel will be devoured by dogs near Jezreel. Then he ran and Jehu went out to tell the others with him that this man had just anointed him king over Israel and the people accepted him as king.

The problem was, Joram was still the actual king over Israel. Joram had been out fighting the Arameans alongside Ahaziah the king of Judah. Joram had been injured in the battle and retreated to Jezreel to recover from his wounds. Ahaziah was also at Jezreel visiting with Joram. Jehu, knowing they were together, gathered his forces and rode out to Jezreel. As his forces approached, Joram and Ahaziah both got in their respective chariots and rode out to confront Jehu. As Joram approached Jehu, Jehu made his intentions known and as Joram turned to flee warning Ahaziah, he was shot through the heart by an arrow from Jehu's bow. Jehu had Joram's body tossed onto the vineyard which Ahab and Jezebel had killed the man for. When Ahaziah saw this, he turned to escape but was wounded on his way. He made his escape but inevitably died from his injuries. One story tells he died in hiding and another tells he was taken and killed. Regardless, he did not survive the encounter.

Jehu continued to Jezreel and found Jezebel looking down at him from a window. When she called to him to ask if he had come in peace, Jehu called back asking if anyone was on his side. In response to this, two eunuchs looked out the window and Jehu called to them to throw her down. They threw Jezebel out of the window and her blood splattered when she struck the ground. Later in the day when they went out to retrieve her remains, they found that the dogs had eaten everything except her skull, feet, and hands. Thus, the punishment God called down on her had been fulfilled. Remember, we have no such command from God in our time today. Be mindful of time and circumstance.

Jehu then called for the heads of all seventy of the men in the family line of Ahab. He called for the people to do this themselves. When the people decided that Jehu was too powerful for them to go against, they did as he asked and killed the seventy princes

of Ahab and had their heads brought to Jehu. In this way, Jehu made it so the people could not say he overthrew the throne as they themselves took part in it. He continued to kill all who were in the family line of Ahab thus fulfilling the word of God.

Next Jehu set his sights on the ministers of Baal. He deceitfully told everyone that he was going to hold a sacrifice to Baal. The ministers of Baal all gathered at the temple of Baal as the king had asked. He feigned a sacrifice to Baal and as the ministers were all comfortable in the temple, Jehu sealed it shut and sent his officers in to kill every one of them. They did and they destroyed the temple, turning it into a latrine. Therefore, he had destroyed all Baal worship in Israel, however he did not destroy the golden calves and allowed people to continue worshipping to them. Furthermore, during the reign of Jehu, Hazael was overpowering the Israelites throughout the land and Israel was beginning to diminish.

Meanwhile in Judah, after the death of Ahaziah, his mother Athaliah had assumed the throne and killed the rest of the royal family. She was ensuring her place as the leader of Judah. However, what she didn't know was that one of her daughters had taken one of King Ahaziah's sons and hidden him from her. When the boy turned seven years old, a group of people who knew about the hidden boy anointed him king over Judah. The people rejoiced and when Athaliah heard the commotion and discovered what had happened, she shouted treason, but the people were decided, and they had her killed. At that time, the people of Judah tore down their alter to Baal and killed the priest of Baal who had been in their land. Joash was the boy who was seven years old when he took the throne in Judah.

Joash was a good ruler over Judah. He organized the work needed to repair the temple of the Lord which had taken damage over the years of warring. He collected money from the people, not to pay for fancy dress of the temple, but rather to pay the workers who were restoring it. Also, during his reign, king Hazael of Aram was planning to attack Judah, so king Joash had all the treasure of the land, including that from the temple sent to Hazael as a ransom for Judah and Hazael accepted his ransom, leaving them unharmed. However, Joash also did not remove the high places where the people continued to worship other gods. After ruling the people for forty years, Joash's officials conspire and kill him because they said he had murdered the son of a priest, leaving his son Amaziah to take the throne.

While Joash was king in Judah, Jehu died in Israel and his son Jehoahaz became king in Israel. Jehoahaz continued Israel's practice of marrying people from other nations and allowing the worshipping of other gods. Because of this, the Lord's wrath against the people was not lifted as it was in Judah. The Israelites remained under persecution from Hazael. Eventually Jehoahaz sought the Lord's favor, and they were saved from the attacking Arameans allowing them to live peacefully in their homes again. However, despite Jehoahaz seeking the Lord's favor, the people did not, and they continued in their same practices. When Jehoahaz died, his son Jehoash succeeded him.

Similar to our search for understanding as it came to the timeline of the story of Job, there are two other books of the traditional bible which belong in the timeframe near where we are in the story, Joel, and Obadiah. We have learned that Elijah was the only remaining prophet of God. But since then, we have learned that Elisha had other prophets of God with him (perhaps the hundred who had been hidden away previously). Joel and Obadiah were both prophets of God and both occur within this time frame. Joel gives us an image of the attacking nations as a swarm of locusts invading every open space, consuming everything consumable. "Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste- nothing escapes them." He calls for repentance from the people saying, "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing- grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God." Note the blessing he proposes would be an offering to the Lord, not something of a physical nature for the people.

Then Joel goes on to talk about a time to come when God will send His spirit down on people to show miracles, which Peter later tells us is referring to God's spirit descending on Jesus's followers, but Joel's vision of the future goes further to the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord when all men will be judged. Obadiah's message is very similar. His message is initially targeted at the people of Edom. These are the people who descended from the family line of Esau. He tells of how God will avenge the violence Esau committed against his brother Jacob, but his message doesn't end there. It goes on to speak of the day of the Lord as well. This future day, not yet come to pass when the house of Jacob will reunite and take back the promised land. "The

day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." This message is for all of us. Understand.

With Jehoash on the throne in Israel, the people continued in their sinful practices. During this time, Elisha became ill and was dying. Jehoash went to visit Elisha and while on his bed Elisha gave Jehoash one last vision of what was to come. He informed Jehoash that the Lord would help him destroy the Arameans but when Elisha tells him to take some arrows and strike the ground with them, Jehoash strikes the ground three times. Elisha tells him he should have struck the ground five or six times and since he did not, he will only defeat the Arameans three times and not fully destroy them. Then Elisha died and was buried. It is said, one time while some Israelites were burying a man, a raiding party came upon them and in their haste, they threw the man's body into the tomb with Elisha's. When the man's body touched Elisha's, the man came back to life. This is to give us evidence that our actions in life can continue after our death as long as they are working toward God's purpose.

It is around this time of the story that Hazael king of Aram dies and Ben-Hadad his son succeeded him. Jehoash was then able to reclaim the land of the Israelites which had been formerly taken by Hazael. He defeated Ben-Hadad three times.

During Jehoash's reign in Israel, Amaziah had become king in Judah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, except he too did not remove the high places and continued allowing the worship of other gods, in fact, he even built more sacrificial altars to other gods. He executed the officials who murdered his father. He defeated ten thousand Edomites in the valley of salt which built up his pride. In this prideful state he challenged Jehoash king of Israel to war. Jehoash tried to ignore the taunt but ended up riding out to meet in battle. Jehoash and the Israelites were successful in defeating the people of Judah. They captured Amaziah and plundered all the treasure from Judah including that from the temple of the Lord. Later when Jehoash died, his son Jeroboam succeeded him as king in Israel. Understand this is another man named Jeroboam, not the one who took the throne in Israel at the time they and Judah split. Amaziah lived another fifteen years but was then killed by a group of conspirators. The people of Judah then adopted Azariah, Amaziah's son, to be the king in Judah. Azariah was also known as Uzziah.

It is important for us to take a moment of understanding here to recap what we have learned so far, remembering our goal is to understand God's purpose. We know that God created all things. He created Adam and Eve in the garden and then created mankind on the Earth. We know that Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and were then cast out of the garden and sent to work the Earth with the rest of mankind. We know God's chosen people were joining together with mankind. We know the Lord grew tired of contending with mankind and was appalled at the wickedness which had infested His creation. We know that God does not fear correction and eliminated all life from the Earth, both His chosen people and the rest of mankind with the exception of only one family who God found worthy of saving. We know they were tasked with repopulating the Earth. We know during that course, at each generation, all fell from walking in God's ways except only one line. We know that single lineage ended up finding a home in Egypt and growing greatly in number without any of their lineage failing to serve God. We know the situation which caused them to be enslaved, and we know that God chose to save them. We also know at that time God determined that line of people needed a book of law to follow and so provided it to them. We know that despite having the book of law, the people were not able to remain true to following God's commands. We know judges were raised to help guide the people in this effort but they too failed. We know the people demanded a king to help keep them in line, and we are seeing now during this time of kings, that too is failing. Although prophets had been around, the true prophets of God had been few and far between. Understanding that a prophet is one who speaks God's word, a messenger of God's true message, we know the early original prophets such as Moses, but there has also been mention in the story of groups of prophets all prophesying together. Then we learned how Jezebel slaughtered those prophets leaving only Elijah. But God clearly now sees the need for His prophets more than ever. His message was being both lost and ignored.

But in all this, we are also starting to see a transition into the next phase for God's people. They are clearly becoming ever more divided. They are allowing the outside influence of other nations to corrupt their actions. The time for protecting God's people from these nations was ending and it was time to start preparing them for the next step in God's purpose. Remember everything according to His plan. Both the good and the bad we have explored so far have been working toward His purpose. We have seen God send the serpent to Adam and Eve and place the evil spirit of the Lord on Saul.

We know God caused the Israelites to become slaves in Egypt, and we know He freed them from that oppression. Knowing and understanding that both the things we consider to be good and the things we consider to be bad are part of God's plan, we can know there is always hope. Although the Judeans and the Israelites were in dismay under the rule of these kings, as the prophets would tell us, it was only going to get worse. But the hope is starting to show itself in the form of the prophets whose mission was to share God's word with the people. It was the transitional phase, transitioning from protecting the Israelites from outside influence into the Israelites themselves becoming the outside influence. These prophets were sent to warn the people of what was coming and to serve as an example of how the people should spread the word of God to all the surrounding lands. Jonah was one of these prophets and his story takes place during the reign of king Jeroboam the second.

Jonah was asked by God to go to the great city of Nineveh. This was the oldest and most populous city in the ancient Assyrian world. It was said it took at least three days to visit the city. Understand, most cities of the time could be traversed in a day or less, this one was said to take three. It must have stretched for miles. It also had grown a reputation for being ruthless, blood thirsty people. They even built monuments to their cruelty. God knew this about the city and that is why He was sending Jonah to it, to warn it. Jonah was of course hesitant to take on this task as any of us would be. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah found some sailors and paid the fare to them so they would allow him to join their ship and sail away in the opposite direction. Nineveh was inland along the Tigris River. Jonah was sailing out to sea. However, a terrible storm came on and threatened to tear the boat to pieces. Now the crew on board knew that Jonah was fleeing from God, and they asked Jonah what they needed to do to stop the storm from destroying them. Jonah told them that if they threw him overboard, the storm would stop. He knew he went against God's command, and he knew that if he was thrown overboard, he would surely die in the sea but that the storm would cease. The men of the crew tried to avoid this action, surely not wishing to kill Jonah. However, after trying for an extended time to row the boat, they eventually give in and asking for forgiveness, they threw Jonah overboard.

Now the story goes that God sent a massive fish to swallow Jonah and he rode inside that fish for three days. Find faith. While riding inside of this great fish, Jonah spends those three days praying to God a prayer of thanks for sparing his life. How

difficult it is for us to understand this prayer of gratitude. Most of us would have been in despair having gone against God, fled for our lives, given up hope and agreed to be tossed to our death in the sea, only to be eaten by a giant fish. Yet Jonah was thankful. The fish spit him out on dry ground and God once again tells him to go to Nineveh. This time, Jonah complies. He enters the city and on the very first day he proclaims that there will be forty more days before Nineveh is overturned. Immediately that very day, the people of Nineveh believed him and relented in their ways. The king of Nineveh even removed his robes and began wearing sack cloth. He proclaimed to all the people to change their ways and call on God urgently to spare them. Because of their change in ways, God had compassion on them and spared them.

This upset Jonah. He was frustrated. He prayed to God saying that he told God before he even left home that God was gracious and compassionate and would relent from sending calamity on the people. Then he prayed to God to take his life. But God replied asking Jonah if he had any reason to be angry. So, in his frustration, Jonah went and sat down outside of the city. God provided a vine and made it grow over Jonah to shade his head, for which Jonah was happy. But the next morning God sent a worm which devoured the vine, so it withered. When the sun came up God sent a scorching wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head until he felt faint. Again, he said that he would rather be dead. God asks Jonah if he has any reason to be mad about the vine. To which Jonah says he does and is angry enough to die. God says to Jonah that Jonah has been concerned about the vine, but Jonah did not make it grow or tend it, it sprang up overnight and died overnight. But with more than a hundred and twenty thousand people in Nineveh who don't know their right hand from their left, should God not be concerned with it?

Understand God grew Nineveh, He tended it. He had put His effort into it and was concerned with it. All people on the Earth now were God's chosen people. That was why He sent Jonah. That was why it was important for Jonah to go there. If Jonah had not gone, the people would not have had the chance to fear God and save themselves. This is the beginning of the outreach. Christian church, why do you teach this as a story of a miraculous giant fish who saved one of God's prophets? That is so far from the purpose of this text. It is the beginning of your intended purpose. God didn't save Jonah, He saved Nineveh, the people He created, grew, tended. The fish was no different than Jonah himself, a vessel at God's command. Later Jesus tells us that the

sign of Jonah is the only sign we will have in our current times. Understand, it is not about the fish.

Jonah was not the only notable prophet at this time in the story. Amos was also a prophet of God during the reign of Jeroboam the second in Israel and Azariah, also known as Uzziah, in Judah. While Jonah's message related to the outreach bringing people back to God, Amos had a different message for the people of Israel. Before we hear the message Amos gave us, we should consider the time and circumstance. In Job we learned about the beast from the land, the Behemoth, and the beast from the sea, the Leviathan. We learned how these are symbolic of the technologies of mankind and the change to living in cities rather than nomadic peoples each tending the land for their own. Amos's message to us further details the downward spiral of this wicked inception.

Amos begins by sharing the Lord's message regarding the people of the nations around Israel. He tells how God will send His wrath on each of them. He tells about how Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah will all face God's wrath. Then he proceeds to speak God's word regarding Israel saying, "They sell their righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." Understand he is telling them that their worldly belongings have become more important to them than their righteousness or their people themselves. He further tells them in God's words, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the Earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins." Understand, we have learned how different branches of the genealogies turned away from God. God is now reminding them that Israel was His chosen people above all those who had turned away, but they too were turning away. Because of this, God would no longer view them as His chosen people in the same way. Now in that time and circumstance, they were no different than the other nations He had just condemned before them. God gives them a glimmer of hope using an example of a shepherd saving a sheep from a lion's mouth and only being able to save two legs or an ear. He states, that is how He will save the Israelites, in pieces.

But that is not the end of the lashing God was sending the Israelites. He gives further detail into the mystery behind the Behemoth and the Leviathan stating, "I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished." From this we can now

better understand the way the people lived. They were in pursuit of riches and wealth. They were wanting both a summer house and a winter house. They were adorning their homes in fancy dress. He also states, “Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your free will offerings- boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do.” Here God is denouncing their offerings as meaningless and showing them that they have only been doing it to show themselves as righteous without the proper sacrifice of self. They had been using the Lord to build their own names among each other. So often we see those who do this today. Christian church?

God tries to ignite the fear of the Lord in the people through His words, “prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” He further says, “Fallen is virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.” Understand in God’s sight, Israel had lost its innocence and just like virginity it could not be restored. He says, “You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them;” Comparing the society of that time and circumstance to today’s, most can admit we have not changed these ways. “You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.” The only words of hope which are given are so simple, “Seek me and live;” and “Seek good, not evil, that you may live.”

Next Amos enlightens us all to one of our most common misconceptions regarding the day of the Lord. That future time which still has not come to pass. So many believe when Jesus returns on the day of the Lord, it will be a beautiful awakening. Although it leads to a wonderful promise, it is not so beautiful a prophecy. Amos tells us in God’s words “Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.” Many believe this reference to the day of the Lord refers to the exile of the Israelites which we will soon learn about. However, we must challenge this thinking. Is there only one day of the Lord? Consider the time and circumstance and how we have just discovered that our current circumstance is not too distant from theirs. Perhaps in preparation for the true day of the Lord, we need to take into account the woes faced by the Israelites in that time and circumstance and understand the error of their ways.

God further denounces the Israelites and in the same breath feeds our understanding of the Behemoth and the Leviathan saying, “You lie on beds inlaid with ivory

and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you never grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore, you will be among the first to go into exile." It is evident here that the Israelite people saw themselves as being above all other nations around them. Their pride was on their sleeve. It is not the only place in the text of the Bible where we read that those who are in a higher standing with the Lord will be judged even more harshly than those who do not know the Lord at all. Knowing right from wrong, as it was with Adam and Eve, is a curse on mankind, but only if we do not live by what is right. Understand.

A priest who heard Amos saying these things reported it back to king Jeroboam in Israel. Jeroboam called for Amos to be exiled to Judah fearing he would raise a rebellion. The text doesn't tell us if Amos obliged this demand, however it does tell us that he continued with his message to the people. We are told Amos was shown by God a bowl of ripe fruit. The Lord then tells Amos, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." What do we do with fruit that is ripe? We pluck it from its branch and devour it. It tastes sweet when it is ripe. Understand, the Lord is telling them that the Israelites are ripe for the harvest. We understand this to mean; they are complete and sweet and ready for consumption. But the Lord doesn't operate in this way. He is not trying to taste a delicious taste from mankind. God does not hunger, let alone for ripe food. The meaning is this, if fruit is taken too soon, it is not ready for its purpose. Given time to ripen it will serve its purpose and provide sustenance to those who need it. If God dealt this punishment to the Israelites before they were ripe, they would have been bitter fruit not suited to serve His purpose. They needed to know their sins and be entrenched in it so that when the hammer of God's justice was brought down on them, they would be remorseful and repent rather than bitter. When will the rest of the harvest be ready for the Lord to collect it for His purpose? Understand. The time was ripe then for the people of Israel, but what about our time?

God provides us more insight into the Behemoth and the Leviathan by giving us a quote as if it were us pleading to the Lord, "'When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?'" Then God continues the question with an acerbic addition of what He sees "– Skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and

the needy with a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat." The point is, the people would complain even to God to help raise their wealth as if it was something of value and not just more dust of the Earth. God even warns of something which hits much closer to home for us as a response to that very quote regarding their pursuit to have more wealth, "Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt." And "The Lord, the Lord Almighty, He who touches the Earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn- the whole land rises like the Nile, then sinks like the river of Egypt- He who builds His lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the Earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land- the Lord is His name."

So here, we are expected to reach an understanding that our greed, our desire for wealth, will destroy the Earth. It has even stated a fear to us, which no one of that time would have had in mind, global warming which we have caused by these very same actions. The land will tremble, it will rise like the Nile and fall like the river in Egypt, He who touches the Earth and it melts, who calls the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land… understand.

But lastly God says through Amos that He will give His people a new land that will thrive after the wickedness has been sifted out.

Jeroboam (the second Jeroboam) was king of Israel and Azariah was king in Judah. Jeroboam was still leading the people in their sinful ways, but God had not determined to blot them out yet. After reigning in Israel for forty-one years and accomplishing recovering Damascus and Hamath for Israel, Jeroboam died, and his son Zechariah succeeded him as king in Israel. Meanwhile Azariah, king of Judah, did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. However, he too did not remove the high places and continued allowing the worship of other gods. He helped to build up the city and the military. At one point he went to the temple of the lord to burn incense even though this was something that only the priests would have been allowed to do. Because of this, the Lord afflicted him with leprosy until the day he died. The king's son Jotham had charge of the palace and governed the kingdom. When Azariah dies his son Jotham, who had been running the kingdom, easily took the throne in Judah.

Jeroboam's son Zechariah was only king for six months. He continued doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and was conspired against and publicly assassinated. This happened while Azariah was still king in Judah. At that time, after the assassination of Zechariah, Shallum took the throne of Israel thus ending the reign of Jehu's descendants. But Shallum was only king for about a month before he too was assassinated by a man named Menahem who then assumed the throne.

At this point in the story, we should take a moment to understand another of God's prophets by the name of Hosea. Hosea was a prophet of God during the reign of Azariah also known as Uzziah and continued as a prophet of God through the next several kings. Before we get into the message Hosea sent us, we should understand another facet of the people and their relationship with God. Repeatedly now we have said that these kings although some of them did right in God's eyes, continued with allowing the high places to remain where people would still go to worship other gods. The understanding we must reach is that our relationship to God should be no different than a marriage to a spouse. We should become one with God just as we become one with our spouse in the vows of marriage. God loves us and we owe the reciprocation of that love. God granted us life. We owe Him nothing less than our love. Although the people still loved God, by worshipping the other gods, they were acting adulterously. Understand if we remain married to our spouse but continue to lie with others, we are adulterers. The same concept applies to our relationship with the Lord. How can we say we love God with all our hearts while we are still committing ourselves to another god or something even as fiat as money? In God's eyes the people both of Israel and of Judah were acting adulterously.

Hosea was told by God to find an adulterous woman to marry and children of unfaithfulness because the land was guilty of the vilest adultery, of course meaning their relationship with the Lord. Hosea marries a woman named Gomer and she has children for him. The first child born is named Jezreel. We've heard this name before as the city where Jezebel's life ended. But at that time, we did not talk about what the name Jezreel meant. It means to scatter, or another meaning of it is to sow. God told Hosea to name his first born Jezreel because He would soon punish the people for the massacre at Jezreel. Their second child was named Lo-Ruhamah which means not loved, which God says is because He will no longer show His love to Israel. And their third child was named Lo-Ammi which means not my people which is self-

explanatory. However, God goes on to tell Hosea that the Israelites will still grow in number like the sand of the seashore. And then sometime later in the place where the people were told by God that they were not His people, they would be reunited and be called sons of the living God. There they would appoint one leader and come up out of the land. Stating finally that "great will be the day of Jezreel." Understand the message here. For the people in that time and circumstance it was a message of punishment. For us, this is a message of hope. The scattering, although thought to be a terrible punishment to those people, was the sowing of the seed for us. That day was great because without the scattering of the people, the outreach of God's message would have halted. Everything to God's purpose.

God continues the message by means of Hosea to speak about the similarities between the people's unfaithfulness to God and the unfaithful spouse. The example is raised of a woman who goes from man to man sleeping with them in exchange for clothing, food, oils, etcetera but God would block her path from this and then she would want to return to her husband realizing she was better off with him than she was with these other men who cared not for her. God's argument is that she is not acknowledging those things such as the clothing, food, etcetera came from God. The concept is that we should not be prostituting ourselves for all these worldly things, when God is the one who provides them for us. We are unfaithful wives. But God's message through Hosea does not end there. There is hope in the message. After God says He will block those things from the woman, or as we now understand- us, at that point we will want to turn back to God, or as Hosea was instructed to word it, back to her husband. When that time comes, God will respond to us, He will receive the people with open arms to be joined with Him as one. The message relayed is that then we finally accept that our lives are meaningless without God, peace will come over the land, and all will live in unity. Understand the meaning here, it is not a single person who makes this turn for mankind, but it is mankind as a whole. When that time comes all of mankind will turn back to the Lord, back to her husband, realizing they were better with God. What all must God take from us for us to reach this level of repentance? God tells Hosea to return to his wife and to love her despite her adultery. Do we understand what this means? God returns to us with love despite our adultery against Him.

Hosea continues his message to the people being forthright regarding the sins they commit. He also speaks to their lack of knowledge and their lack of desire for knowledge. As he is quoting the Lord to the people he tells them this striking quote, "a people without *understanding* will come to ruin!". Hosea gives God's word straight to the priests and the leaders of the Israelites. God's true messengers do not shy away from telling those who do wrong the truth in their actions regardless of their standing among the people. God directly tells them that because of their actions He will leave them and no longer protect them. "Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." Doesn't the Lord still await this today?

Hosea tells us what we need to do, "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge Him." Understand the words Hosea gives us. "He has torn us to pieces" even Hosea understood that all things come from God for God's purpose even tearing us to pieces. The introduction of the knowledge of good and evil tears us to pieces. Our daily struggle to understand and discern our actions often tears us to pieces. But God heals this for us. If we return to God and walk in all His ways, we are healed of these injuries. The second day has passed, now is the time for understanding. Now is the time for us to be revived in our spirit by the Lord. Acknowledge the Lord, bring about the Lord's revival of our true selves. Make ready for us to be restored so that we may live in the presence of the Lord.

The final quote Hosea gives us is a powerful one, "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will *understand* them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them." Understand.

During the reign of Azariah in Judah and before Jotham took the throne in Judah, Menahem was the king in Israel. Menahem did evil in the eyes of the Lord by continuing to allow the worship of other Gods and allowing the outside influence to continue. During his reign the king of Assyria invaded the land and, in an attempt to save the people, Menahem decided to devise a plan to strengthen his own hold on the kingdom. He made every wealthy man in the land give fifty talents of silver to the king of Assyria.

This gift of the people's money caused Assyria to withdraw, leaving their land. When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah succeeded him as king in Israel. Pekahiah reigned for two years and continued the course of doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. One of his chief officers Pekah conspired against him and assassinated him then taking the throne for himself. It is during the reign of Pekah when Azariah dies and Jotham takes the throne in Judah.

It is during this time that we should learn about two other prophets who carried important messages to the people, Micah, and Isiah. Micah was a prophet who lived in the rural area whereas Isiah lived among the nobles and leaders in the cities. Despite the difference in their lifestyles, their messages are quite similar. Understanding the time and circumstance, we know that this new form of life, living alongside the Behemoth and the Leviathan, has proven to be a challenge for the people of God. Their rulers never learn from one generation to the next. In fact, it had gotten to the point of people forsaking God and falling completely from Him. Things began to feel hopeless for those who truly still loved the Lord and sought Him. Micah begins with an explanation of just this.

Micah addresses the people by telling them this is what God says concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. For sake of understanding, Samaria as we stated is the land of Israel and Jerusalem is the main city in the land of Judah. So, this is in reference to Israel and Judah from the perspective of someone who lives outside of the city infrastructure. He tells the people that God is coming down to tread the high places of the Earth. He means this in a threatening way. And he tells them why, saying, "All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?" What clearer way is there to say that the people's want and desire to have an easier life, to have more possessions, more wealth, was their sin, the Behemoth and Leviathan become corrupted. He goes on to tell the people how God has stated He will destroy Samaria. Micah reinforces the message we were given from Hosea stating about Samaria, "Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used." Understand the reference to prostitution as that of the spirit, the unfaithfulness to the Lord. Micah also calls out those who plot to do wicked things and those who claim to prophesy yet only tell lies to win the people over. He also calls out the leaders who continually lead the people to sin under the

deceitful falsehood of the Lord's protection. Micah quotes those leaders by saying, "Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us."

Then Micah gives hope. He tells the people of the last days. He tells them that in the time of the last days, the mountain (in this case mountain meaning- kingdom) of the Lord's temple will be established, people will flock to it and will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. He tells the people they will be scattered in Babylon, but not to fear because their day of redemption will come. Then he tells the people how Israel will fall first, but Judah will not fall right away. He also tells them that a ruler will come from the land of Judah "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This is of course referring to Jesus. He goes on to tell of more future occurrences, telling the people they will be scattered among the nations and in the last days they will be like a young lion among a flock of sheep. The meaning of this is that in those days, God's people will have the power over the rest and be able to destroy their foes. But we must still understand this as God intends. This does not mean that Christians will kill and destroy non-Christians. It means that God's people, those who truly walk in all His ways will destroy wickedness! He goes on to explain how God will be the one to destroy the cities, the chariots, the witchcraft, the carved images, and the nations who have disobeyed Him.

Micah's profound statement given to get the attention of the people and to help our understanding of the Behemoth and Leviathan, "Listen! The Lord is calling to the city- and to fear your name is wisdom- 'Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.'" Then after a short lashing regarding the sins of the city he shares God's further message, "Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword. You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine." How eerily familiar this sounds.

As his writing proceeds Micah tells of God's impression of the people. In it, he states on God's behalf, "Now is the time of their confusion." And further he states, "The Earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds." Oh, how we have misunderstood. But Micah gives one last glimmer of hope as

he ends his writing to us stating that God will again have compassion on us, treading our sins underfoot and hurling our iniquities into the sea as He has pledged all along.

The timeframe of Isiah's message begins during this time of the kings and continues into kings we have not yet learned of, however since his message begins now and gives us insight, this is an appropriate place in the story for us to understand this message. Isiah states his message is regarding Judah and Jerusalem. This makes sense since he was living among the leaders in the land of Judah. His message begins with the very concept of *understanding*. "The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not *understand*." He goes on to speak of people's woes and how those relate to the sins of the people. Through Isiah, God tells the people how their sacrifices, offerings, and festivals hold no meaning to God anymore due to their lack of obedience otherwise. He goes on to tell them another message, like Hosea's, "See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her- but now murderers!"

But Isiah's message isn't all accusation of the people. He, as do the other prophets of God, gives the people a ray of hope. He says the same message Micah gave us about the last days and that at that time the Lord's temple will be established. The message regarding these end days is similar to the others stating that the Lord's people will rise up and the wicked of the Earth will fall.

Then Isiah goes into a more personal message for the people of Judah stating that the Lord is going to cut them off from their supply lines and cause them to break apart and fall. Isiah has a certain writing style that is often admired. He uses imagery to help make his case and we should be grateful for his attention to detail, which still strikes us as true today. Of course, in most of the writing he is giving us God's words, certainly this gratitude we have for his writing style belongs to God. When speaking of the sinful nature of the people of Judah, God states through Isiah, "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald." Then when speaking of the day of the Lord, Isiah tells us, "In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the

perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls." Even then it was understood that all these things bring about sin. Christian church, why is it your custom to have the people adorn themselves with such things when worshipping with you?

Isiah gives us another message which holds course today, "Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land." Oh, what have we done? He calls woes out to many other actions people took part in, yet he tells repeatedly that despite these actions of the people, God continues to stay His hand from destroying them.

Next Isiah tells us of a mysterious story. He tells us that in the year king Uzziah died, also known as king Azariah, Isiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne. He tells us that above Him were something called seraphs each with six wings. Later in the revelation of Jesus Christ we are given more insight into these creatures as being the representation of strength, endurance, free will, and hope. The term seraph simply means burning or dazzling. The number six represents mankind, their wings symbolize speed, swiftness, and protection. Isiah tells us that two of their wings covered their faces, two covered their feet which represents the actions of our lives, and with the other two they flew. The number two represents witness. It takes two to bear witness, one alone cannot substantiate their own testimony. So, we can understand from this that mankind, six, is covering the face or mindset, and the feet or actions of their strength, endurance, free will, and hope swiftly yet for the purpose of protection. Isiah tells us that the seraphs were calling to one another saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole Earth is full of His glory." Still confused? God will explain it to us now as He stated to Isiah what He needed His prophet to tell the people regarding this very mystery, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never *understanding*; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, *understand* with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Surely this is a confusing message as well. Why would God want us not to see and hear and understand? What protection were the wings giving the creatures? Was it to protect us, or to protect God's plan? Understand everything to God's plan.

Isiah must have also questioned this in a similar way as he responded to God asking, "For how long, O Lord?" And here is God's response, "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid to waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land." It seems we are no closer to understanding God's purpose for us on this Earth, yet we have learned more. At least from this we understand that God intentionally blinded, deafened, and disabled us from understanding the fullness of His purpose and how to properly use our strength, endurance, free will, and hope until the time when all is laid to waste. Now is the time for *understanding*!

At this time in the story king Uzziah died and his son Jotham began to reign in Judah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, however, he too did not remove the high places where the people worshipped other gods. But during the reign of Jotham, the Lord began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel against Judah. When Jotham died his son Ahaz succeeded him as king. Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He even sacrificed his own son in fire following the customs of the nations God had driven out. Isiah tells us how king Rezin and king Pekah came out to attack Judah, but they could not overpower it.

Isiah tells us how God sent him to king Ahaz to tell the king not to fear the invading Arameans and Israelites, that God had a plan for their destruction. He tells Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign, but Ahaz says he will not ask, that he will instead put the Lord to the test. Isiah tells him, since he won't ask for a sign, the Lord will give him one anyway. He tells of the sign to come of a virgin who will give birth to a Son and will call him Immanuel meaning God is with us. Of course, he is referring to Jesus, but he also tells Ahaz that before this boy becomes a man, the two kings Ahaz fears will be laid waste. And for Ahaz, the Lord will bring a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah, He will bring the king of Assyria. And in addition to that, the land will be fruitless, allowing only briers and thorns. The timing of this message in the Bible coincides with the timeframe of the Neo-Assyrian era, their time of greatest power. Isiah tells the people how Assyria is going to sweep through and cover their land stating that God is with Assyria in this effort. It is stated that this will happen because of the sins of the people against God. This is true, yet everything for God's

purpose and everything according to God's plan. God does not fear correction, yet everything in its due time. Find faith. God's purpose is not always as simple as it seems.

Isiah continues by telling us more about the coming of Jesus and how Jesus will rule over all when the day of the Lord comes. He also continues to say woe to the people for more acts of sin they commit even saying woe to the Assyrians who God was sending to sweep over them. Again, after these woes Isiah gives hope to the people regarding the time during the last days when the people will return to the Lord. Then again, he tells of the coming of Jesus saying, "from His roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him- the Spirit of wisdom and *understanding*, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord- and He will delight in the fear of the Lord."

Isiah then gives his oracle concerning Babylon. It is an interesting message as he calls for the people to raise a banner and usher in the mighty Babylon to conquer them, stating that those who truly believe in the Lord will understand this as a necessary step in the redemption of God's people and the fulfillment of God's plan. Yet in the same message he tells them the graphic violent nature of this impending doom for them. "See the day of the Lord is coming- a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it." And with that, God is telling the people that although Babylon may conquer and disperse them, Babylon too will meet its fate and be overthrown by God. Then returning to his message about the day of the Lord He reminds the people that they will have the tables turned and they will hold power over the nations they are dispersed to. Here is where Isiah is giving us the knowledge needed to understand the message Jesus later gives us in His revelation. Babylon in this message symbolizes the wickedness of mankind as a whole. In other words, the combination of the Behemoth, the Leviathan, and the contempt of Satan. All of mankind's wicked acts, their adulterous unfaithfulness, their turning to other gods, their love of wealth and comforts, their unrelenting desires. Babylon will meet its fate yet.

Isiah also prophesied against Assyria, the Philistines, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Babylon (the actual nation), Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem, Tyre, and eventually the entire Earth. During his prophecy about Jerusalem Isiah gives more mention to Jesus yet he does it in a mysterious manner. He tells them God's word speaking about the

leadership of God's people and referring to a member of the house of king Hezekiah, whom we have not learned about yet, "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will clothe Him with your robe and fasten your sash around Him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on His shoulder the key to the house of David; what He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open. I will drive Him like a peg into a firm place; He will be a seat of honor for the house of his Father. All the glory of His family will hang on Him: its offspring and offshoot- all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to the jars. In that day, the peg driven into the firm place will give way; it will be sheared off and will fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut down." First, we must understand that Jesus comes from the family line of king David. The house of David is the house of God's people. Jesus, being of the royal bloodline will have every right to the throne, the key to the house of David. He says He will drive Him like a peg into a firm place. Understand this is in reference to the resurrection of Jesus and His ascent into heaven. But note the main message here is in reference to the day of the Lord when that peg will give way and everything that hung on Jesus, the full weight of our sins will be cut down. Understand.

In another passage when speaking about the day of the Lord, Isiah tells us, "In that day, the Lord will punish with His sword, His fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent; He will slay the monster of the sea." Understand? We need to. As Isiah further states in this same passage, "For this is a people without *understanding*; so their Maker has no compassion on them, and their Creator shows them no favor." We must understand how the Leviathan, the monster of the sea, relates to the people without *understanding*. Our understanding of this was not missed on our part. In fact, Isiah tells us why we have not realized these things when he is speaking to the people of David's city, God's chosen people, those in Judah, "Be stunned and amazed, blind yourselves and be sightless; be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from beer. The Lord has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); He has covered your heads (the seers). For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I can't; it is sealed." Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I don't know how to read." The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."" Clearly it has been part of God's plan to keep the meaning of these things from us. To blind us and cause us to walk around foolishly. But that time has now passed. Now is the time for the blinders to come off. Now is the time for *understanding*.

Following the story line of the kings, we were at the point when Ahaz was king over Judah and Pekah was king over Israel. However, we got ahead of ourselves a bit as we discovered Isiah's message. Although we learned of how Jotham died and Ahaz took the throne in Judah, during that time we did not discuss what was happening with the kingship in Israel. We have already discovered in part the wickedness of Pekah king of Israel. We know he assassinated Pekahiah to take the throne, we know he joined forces with Rezin king of Aram to attack Judah, he also continued the practice of worshipping other Gods and allowing outside influence. Also, during his reign, the king of Assyria came and took over most of the major cities in Israel deporting the people to Assyria. After that, Hoshea conspired against Pekah and assassinated him assuming the throne in Israel. This occurred during the reign of Jotham.

Meanwhile in Judah when Jotham dies, Ahaz takes the throne. As we learned through Isiah's message, God tried to help Ahaz against the attacking Arameans who were joined with the Israelites against Judah. But Ahaz wasn't dealing with just one nation, or two, he also had the threat of the Assyrian invasion looming. Since Ahaz put the Lord to the test with the Aramean invasion and learned from Isaiah that God would not help him, he reached out to the king of Assyria sending him all the gold and silver of the land in hopes he would come out and save them from their attackers. The king of Assyria complied and attacked the Aramean army killing their king Rezin. After receiving help from the king of Assyria, Ahaz went to visit him and took the plans from his temple and had one built in Judah. He removed many items from the temple of the Lord and desecrated it by turning it into a temple like that of the Assyrians.

The tilling of God's vineyard in preparation for the sowing of the seeds

As Ahaz was king in Judah, Hoshea became king in Israel. He would be the last king of Israel. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It is important to understand that Hoshea was a former vassal of the king of Assyria. That means he was devoted as a servant to him in exchange for land or position. He used to pay tribute to the king of Assyria, but as he was now king in Israel, he stopped paying tribute to the king of Assyria and instead began paying it to the king of Egypt. When the king of Assyria was made aware of this, he captured Hoshea and threw him in prison. He then invaded the entire land and laid siege to it for three years. He was successful in defeating the Israelites and deported them to Assyria. Israel had fallen. God did this because of all the sins of the people. They had completely lost their faithfulness to God. They acted just as the people who God had driven out before them did. The inception of the outside influence, what Balaam taught Balak, had taken full hold. God warned the people through all the prophets and seers, but they were stiff necked, blind, and deaf to the message. The Lord had told them, "Do not do as they do." But the people did not listen. We need to learn from this message. Now only the tribe of Judah was left, but they too were not walking in God's ways or keeping the covenant with Him. Therefore, the Lord rejected all the people of Israel and allowed them to be plundered and taken away.

The people of Assyria moved into the land of Israel also known as Samaria to replace the Israelites. However, since the people did not know God, God sent lions among them to kill some of them. When word of this reached the king of Assyria, he decided to send some of the captive priests from the Israelites back to the land to teach the Assyrians about God so they would be able to live in the land. But they still worshipped their own gods alongside the true God.

Judah had not been taken over by the Assyrians. Ahaz had died and Hezekiah took the throne in Judah. Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. In fact, it is said that there was no king like him in the land of Judah either before or after him. He removed the high places; kept the commands God had given Moses, and the Lord was with him. He reinstituted the service in the temple after holding a large offering there. He also had the people celebrate Passover. They went around and destroyed the high places and the Asherah poles. Samaria, or Israel was captured in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign in Judah. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria came out to attack Judah. The Assyrians sent word to king Hezekiah

telling him that his rebellion against them was futile and reminding him how all the gods of the nations they had already conquered were not able to stop them and stating that the God of the people in Judah would also not stand in the way. So, Hezekiah went and prayed to the Lord asking for guidance in the situation. God sent His response to Hezekiah through Isiah. Isiah relayed the message to Hezekiah that his prayer was heard and since God found favor in Hezekiah, He would turn away the Assyrian army. That night the angel of the Lord went out and killed a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the rest of their army saw the dead bodies the next morning, they packed up camp and withdrew. Later, one of Sennacherib's sons killed him.

At this time in the story, King Hezekiah becomes deathly ill. Isiah is told by God to go to the king and inform him that he will surely die. The king immediately prays to God reminding God of how faithfully and wholeheartedly he tried to walk in God's ways. God finds this to be good and relents, allowing king Hezekiah to live an additional fifteen years, healing him from his illness. During this exchange between Isiah and king Hezekiah, the king asks what the sign will be that God will heal him and allow him to go to the temple of the Lord, to which Isiah asks Hezekiah if the shadow should go forward ten steps or backward. Hezekiah states it is simple for a shadow to go forward, so he states to have it go back ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. Understand, Ahaz did evil as the king of Judah. Hezekiah was stating it is easy for anyone to correct the path going forward. He understood it takes God to correct the mistakes of the previous generations. It is imperative that we understand this meaning.

At the time of his recovery, Hezekiah received an envoy from Babylon because they had heard of his illness and recovery. He welcomed them and showed them everything in all his warehouses, including all of the treasuries of the land. When Isiah asked the king about this envoy and was told that the king had shown them everything, Isiah informed him that the Lord said, "The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord." To this, Hezekiah states that the message is good because he thought joining with the Babylonians would bring peace. He didn't understand. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh succeeded him as king over Judah.

Isiah continues his message to us giving us some prelude to Jesus. He tells of how there will be the voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord,” this is in reference to John the Baptist who would be this voice calling for the people to prepare the way for the Lord, most people understand this as preparing the way for Jesus. Isiah then goes on to exclaim the Lord’s majesty. He tells of how God has arranged the Earth in ways that can only come from Him, for example stating in the words of God, “I will put in the desert the cedar and acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and *understand*, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.” Then Isiah tells us more of the coming of Jesus. God has Isiah give us some insight into how He communicates with us stating, “See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

Isiah goes on to negate the gods of the Babylonians. He gives description of how the God almighty, reigns above any other gods. But it is also at this point in Isiah’s message when we receive a bit more insight into the revelation of Jesus. Isiah gives us one of the first descriptions of Babylon the prostitute. He addresses the virgin daughter of Babylon sitting in the dirt without a throne. It is important to understand that his message is about the Babylonian empire, yet his meaning is about the transformation of the Leviathan into this new thing, this new understanding of Babylon. He tells the daughter of Babylon that no longer will she be called queen of kingdoms. He is of course now speaking of the fall of this prostitute, lady Babylon. Understand the prostitute as being unfaithful to the Lord. Isiah gives a quote of this Babylon saying, “You said, ‘I will continue forever- the eternal queen!’ But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen.” To this he also says, “A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.”

After this, he speaks of the stubbornness of Israel, yet he gives them hope of the freedom to come. And Isiah gives us insight into what the people must do, “Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it to the ends of the Earth; say, ‘The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob.’”

Isiah goes into further detail regarding Jesus, this time God is speaking of Jesus' life in the past tense through Isiah, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgement, He was taken away. And who can speak of His descendants? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was stricken." This contains important insight.

Isiah goes into further insight of the things to come, things relating to the day of the Lord and the gathering and redemption of God's people in a time to come. This we will understand better later in the story.

King Hezekiah's son Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king in Judah. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, rebuilding the high places his father had destroyed, he built temples to Baal and raised Asherah poles. He built altars to the stars in the temple of the Lord. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and other such things provoking God to anger. Therefore, God says to the people through the prophets that He will scatter Judah, bring disaster on them, and wipe out Jerusalem. God sent the Assyrians who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, and took him to Babylon. He was distressed and prayed to God humbling himself. God heard his plea and allowed him to return to his kingdom and from then on, he knew that the Lord is God. He then rebuilt the wall of the city and removed the foreign gods and altars from the temple of the Lord. However, the people did not stop worshipping other gods. When Manasseh died, his son Amon succeeded him as king in Judah.

Next in the story we should consider two other prophets and their messages to the people, Nahum, and Habakkuk. Both of these prophets were around during the time of king Manasseh and as the Assyrians' rule was drawing to an end. Nahum begins his message by telling us it is an oracle regarding Nineveh, which was the capital city of the neo-Assyrian empire. He warns the people of Nineveh that God does not relent from bringing calamity down on those who oppose Him. It seems although Ninevah heeded Jonah's warning, they too had fallen from following God. This message not only warns the Assyrian people, but it also brings hope to the people of Judah. He describes the Assyrians as a lion who stores up its prey filling its lair only to have its lair destroyed by God. Nahum gives further detail into the prostitute we have

discussed saying, “Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses- all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.” And after reminding them that God will have His vengeance on them, he adds this interesting note, “You too will become drunk; you will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy.” This can be easily understood as Nahum telling the Assyrians that Babylon was coming to overthrow them, or even that Rome would follow behind, further bringing distress on them. But we must understand this in a different way. This is the same message the prophets had been giving to all of the Israelite people. That they would be drunk, scattered into hiding, seeking refuge from the enemy. Do we see how God is telling us that from this point on, all people will be considered the same in the eyes of the Lord? Understand.

Habakkuk begins his message with a complaint to the Lord. He complains asking how long until God will answer their pleas to stop the violence. He wonders why God makes the people see such calamities. God responds telling Habakkuk to wait and watch. He says He is going to bring the Babylonians to destroy the Assyrians. Habakkuk’s second complaint is asking God why He tolerates the treacherous. God’s answer to this is one which requires insight. He says this revelation awaits an appointed time. He calls this oppressive, violent enemy by the pronoun “he” in order to best portray His meaning. He says, “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright- but the righteous will live by his faith- indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.” Here is the revelation, this “he” which God refers to is the same as Satan. But this is a message of hope as God goes on to say that the nations “he”, Satan, has plundered will plunder Satan. Habakkuk ends his message with a prayer committing himself to patiently awaiting the time when God brings this to happen.

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king in Judah. He reigned only two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord as his father had. His officials ended up conspiring against him and assassinated him in his palace. They made his son Josiah king in his place. Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, and he reigned for thirty-one years. He did right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of king David. King Josiah gave instructions to the people to work on rebuilding and

restoring the temple of the Lord. During this process, Hilkiah, the high priest found the book of the law written by Moses, in the temple of the Lord. He turned it in to Shaphan who was the secretary, and in turn Shaphan reported it to King Josiah. When he heard the words from the book of the law, he tore his clothes out of grief and asked for someone to verify this writing's exactness. When word came back from a prophetess of the time, Josiah was informed that since he repented when he discovered the book of law, although God would still bring this calamity down on the Israelites, it would not be during Josiah's life. So, King Josiah gathered all the people in the land and read them every word of the book of the law provided by Moses. There the king renewed the covenant with the people- to follow the Lord and keep His commands, regulations, and decrees with all his heart, and all the people did the same.

After that, king Josiah and all the people went through all the land and tore down the altars to other gods, the Asherah poles, the temples, and anything else they found which the book of law warned against. They cleaned up the streets so to speak. And then he called for the people to return to their Passover celebrations. They say neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did. Yet even after all this, God did not relent from His anger toward the people because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke His anger. While Josiah was king, Pharoah Neco who was the king of Egypt went up to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah went out to meet him in battle and in that battle, Neco killed Josiah. The people took Jehoahaz his son as their king.

Just as king Josiah was beginning to bring the people back into God's ways, there was another prophet, Zephaniah who begins his message telling how God will sweep away everything from the Earth. But after that, he directs his message to the people of Judah. He speaks to the double mindedness of the people worshipping God along with other gods. He also speaks of their wealth and their complacency, condemning both. He transitions his message into the coming day of the Lord, calling it a day of darkness and gloom. So, he tells the people to gather together before that time. "Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."

Then he goes on to speak against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, Assyria, and then regarding the future of Jerusalem. When speaking of Jerusalem, he says, "Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled!" and "I said to the city, 'Surely you will fear

me and accept correction!'" But God says the people still act corruptly so He tells us, "Therefore wait for me, for the day I will stand up to testify." God is referring to the day He will destroy the nations. But in this same message, of course there is a ray of hope. God says that at that time, He will purify the lips of the peoples so all of them will call on the name of the Lord. He says in that time, the people will not need to fear any harm, adding, "At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the Earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes." And that is the end of Zephaniah's message to us. Understand.

Jeremiah was another prophet who began his journey at the time of king Josiah. His message begins with a tale of how God told him from a young age that he must go to the people who God tells him to and say to them only what God tells him to say. He starts by telling Jeremiah that God is going to bring punishment on the people by allowing the nations from the north to come in and take over the land. He warns the people that even if they sought help from Egypt, they would not be saved. God uses Jeremiah's message to explain to the people of Judah that even though they saw what happened to the Israelites who were living in the land of Israel when they were overthrown and scattered, the people in Judah still did not repent of their ways.

After king Josiah's death, the people of the land started to return to their evil ways. Jeremiah saw this change in the people and his message from God speaks to it. God voices His distress to the people regarding their persistent warfare saying, "Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?"

Jeremiah also gives God's word to the people, saying, "A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?" An interesting insight, isn't it?

Since pharaoh Neco killed Josiah, his son Jehoahaz took the kingship. He only reigned for three months and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. But Pharaoh Neco put him in chains and forced the people to pay a levy to him. He took another of Josiah's

sons Eliakim, changed his name to Jehoiakim and put him in charge of the people since he would help get the people to pay the pharaoh. Neco also had Jehoahaz killed.

Jeremiah's message continues on through these kings as he tells the people of their continual wrongdoing. God had recognized the people's faith was unfounded. He says, "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my name, and say, 'We are safe'- safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house which bears my name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! Declares the Lord." Understand at that time, there was only one temple to the Lord. Christian church, in today's time we have many sanctuaries and temples, and do we treat this hypocrisy any differently today than the people of that time did with only one temple? This is the reason God was going to send the people away from His presence… Understand.

Jeremiah pleads with God asking how long God will allow the wicked to prosper. He clearly understood that all things happened to God's purpose. God's response is that the people will be scattered among the wicked nations so that the people of the wicked nations might learn about God and change their ways. We know this to be self-evident in our time as the Christian church has spread the word of God around every nation on Earth. And God reminds Jeremiah that the time will come when He calls His people out of the lands they are scattered in, and He hopes those of the wicked nations will change their ways and gather with His people. But any who do not listen will be completely uprooted and destroyed. Understand.

God tells Jeremiah to get a linen belt and to hide it in a crevice. He does. Sometime later, God tells him to go and retrieve the belt and when Jeremiah does, the belt is ruined and useless. God says in this same way; He will ruin the pride of Judah. God explains that He bound the house of Israel around Him like a belt, but they have not listened. We must understand God is saying He will tuck the people away until they are completely ruined. God also says He will make all the people drunk. This is not the first time we have heard this reference. He says that nothing will stop Him from destroying them. Everything for God's purpose. It is clear at this point in the story that God had given up on this people reforming and turning to walk in all His ways. He

was done with them and would continue His plan as He saw fit. The question remains, what is God's plan, and was this part of His plan all along?

Jeremiah was known among the people as a prophet who would not tell them what they wanted to hear but would instead tell them the bleak truth. He spoke of a day of disaster that God would bring because of the people's stubbornness and refusal to obey God. But as always there is a message of hope which comes with it as God says, "However the days are coming, when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the Lord lives who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where He had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers. But now I will send for many fishermen, and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks." This requires insight and understanding.

As Jeremiah was prophesying to the people regarding the calamity they would face, the people were upset with him. One priest named Pashhur had him beaten and jailed for a night. When Jeremiah was released the next day, he starkly reprimanded Pashhur telling him that he would have to suffer and watch those he loved fall by the sword. He also told Pashhur that God was going to send the Babylonians to completely overthrow them and plunder all their treasuries including the temple of the Lord taking everything back to Babylon.

So, after Neco had killed Josiah and made Jehoiakim king in Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years before changing his mind and rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord sent raiders from the Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites to destroy Judah. After reigning eleven years Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin succeeded him as king in Judah.

Before Jehoiakim died, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, taking some of the treasures from the temple of the Lord and carrying them away to Babylon. He also ordered the chief of his court officials to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family or nobility who would be trained in the way of the Babylonians so that they could enter into the king's service. They would be given daily food and wine rations

from the king's table. Among them were some from Judah. They were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Babylonian chief official gave them new names. Daniel became Belteshazzar, Hananiah became Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach, and Azariah became Abednego. God gave knowledge and *understanding* of all kinds of literature and learning to these four men. Furthermore, Daniel was able to understand visions and dreams of all kinds. After the three years of training, these four men were entered into the king's service.

King Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by his dreams, so he called in magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what his dream was and what it meant. They explain to the king that if he does not tell them what the dream was, they will not be able to interpret it for him. This enraged the king so much that he issued a decree to have all the wise men of Babylon killed. When Daniel learned the king had issued this decree, he realized his name was on the list. So, he met with the king and asked him for some time so that he might interpret it for him. Afterwards, Daniel returned home and informed his three friends what was happening. That night God revealed the dream to Daniel.

Daniel told the man sent to execute him not to kill the wise men of Babylon and to take him to the king so he can interpret the dream for him. He goes to the king and tells him the dream and meaning. The dream was a vision of a large statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of partly iron and partly baked clay. A rock was cut out but not by a human and it struck the statue on its feet, smashing them. Then all the rest of the statue broke and fell to pieces and the rock which struck it became a huge mountain which filled the whole Earth. Daniel explains that the head of gold represents King Nebuchadnezzar. He tells the king the dream is a vision of what is to come. The silver was a second kingdom that would come after Babylon. The third of bronze would rule over the whole Earth. The fourth strong as iron breaking and smashing everything. He explains that since the feet and toes were partially iron, and partially baked clay it represents a divided kingdom, partly strong and partly brittle. He tells the king that in the time of those kings, God will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed. That it will crush all those kingdoms and will endure forever. The king was so pleased with Daniel's interpretation that he made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon. But perhaps this is not the interpretation we should understand today.

Clay in that time represented man's ideas. Iron in that time represented strength. The feet of the statue were a mix of man's ideas of their own strength. Bronze represents judgment and silver represents knowledge. Gold represents trials. Understand that we believe our strength comes from our own ideas. We stand on it as if it is our doing. We do the same with our judgement, and knowledge, and we cause trials like Nebuchadnezzar was to the people of that time. Again, of his own ideas. God sent the stone down to crush that thinking. It is not from us that we gain any of this. God will destroy that thinking from us and bring us down, crumbling to the ground. In so doing He will establish His kingdom forever. Understand.

King Nebuchadnezzar made a huge image of gold in the city. He ordered that anytime the people hear any music, they must fall down and worship the image of gold or else they would be thrown into a furnace. This is not something that Daniel or his friends now known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to do. A group of astrologers recognized this about Daniel's three friends and reported it to the king. They are brought before the king and continue to refuse to follow this instruction. The king became furious and ordered that the furnace be made seven times hotter than usual. The men were bound and thrown into the furnace. The flames were so hot that the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace were killed by them. King Nebuchadnezzar looked on as the fire raged and jumped to his feet when he noticed four figures in the furnace walking around unbound and unharmed by the flames. He then went to the furnace and called for the men to come out of it. The three men came out unharmed.

The king now realized it was an angel of the Lord who had gone into the furnace and appeared as the fourth figure. He realized now that the faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to their God was rewarded. From that time on, the king said that if anyone spoke bad about the God of these three men, they would be cut to pieces, and he promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. This time he dreamed of a large tree which reached the sky and housed the animals and food for all. He heard a voice from heaven saying to cut the tree down, but to leave its stump and roots in the ground and the grass of the field. That he would be given the mind of an animal until seven times pass by. The interpretation which Daniel gives is that the tree is symbolic of

Nebuchadnezzar and that he is to be cut down and led to walk around like an animal until seven times pass so that he may know God is the Lord. A year later this very thing happens. As Nebuchadnezzar was gloating over his kingdom he was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. At the end of the seven times his sanity was restored, and he praised God. It becomes clear that God was with Nebuchadnezzar in order to fulfill His punishment on His people.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king in Judah, and he only reigned for three months. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. At that time, Babylon was attacking Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar arrived, Jehoiachin along with his family surrendered to the king of Babylon. He was taken prisoner and not only did Nebuchadnezzar take Jehoiachin, but he also took all the treasure from the Lord's temple and brought it back to Babylon with him. Only the poorest people of the land remained. During the fifth year of the exile of Jehoiachin is when we first hear of the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's writing is known to be one of great intrigue and much debate. It is important for us to reach an understanding of the meaning in his words. Ezekiel had gone into exile in Babylon among one of the first groups to be taken, similar to Daniel. Many have taken a guess as to the meaning of Ezekiel's opening message to us. It is a strange tale full of wonder. It is important to note that Ezekiel tells us what the image is right from the start when he says "… the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."

He explains how he was by a river and saw a storm coming out of the north. He says the center of it looked like a fire, like glowing metal and in that center, he saw four living creatures. The creatures had the form of man, but with four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight with feet like a calf gleaming like burnished bronze. Under their wings they had hands like man, and they went straight ahead not turning about as they moved. Their four faces were man, lion on the right, ox on the left, and eagle. They each had two wings spreading upwards, touching the wings of the next, and two covering their bodies. He tells how fire moved back and forth among the creatures and lightning struck out from it. On the ground beside each creature, he saw a wheel. He tells us how all four wheels looked alike, and each appeared to be a wheel intersecting a wheel. He says as they moved, the wheels would go in any direction the

creatures faced; however, the wheels did not turn about as they moved. He says the rims of the wheels were high and awesome and covered with eyes all around. However the creatures moved, the wheels moved with them. Then he turns his statement to be metaphysical, stating that wherever the spirit would go, the wheels would rise along with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. He tells us that above the heads of the creatures was an expanse sparkling like ice and awesome, and a voice came from above the expanse as the creatures stood still with their wings down. Above the expanse he saw what looked like a throne of sapphire and high above on the throne was a figure like a man. The figure looked like glowing metal from the waist up, and like fire from the waist down. Brilliant light surrounded Him. Then he goes on to help us understand the meaning by saying "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." He says that when he saw it, he fell facedown, and he heard the voice speak to him.

Before we get into what the voice told him, let's understand the meaning of the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. The four creatures were like man. The faces of man, lion meaning power, ox meaning hard work or strength, and eagle meaning swiftness. The legs were straight meaning to follow God completely as natural man. The feet like a calf meaning their actions in strength, were burnished bronze meaning durability. The hands of man regarding work, guidance, and deeds. And they did not turn as they moved. But we need to combine the wheels with the creatures, as they were in the vision, in order to reach our understanding. The wheel intersecting a wheel means it represents a complex interaction or process. The wheels also did not turn as they went, and the eyes all around represent wisdom and understanding. So, let's put some of our modern-day knowledge into this. A wheel moves without slipping when the speed at the base of the wheel is zero, so the speed is from the center of the mass or the center of the wheel. These wheels moved without turning at all, meaning the velocity did not come from any action at their center. They moved by being pushed externally. This is important to our understanding. We must consider the wings. The wings represent the protection of God. So now we can understand. No matter our (we, being the creatures like man) power, work, deeds, strength, or swiftness of natural life, God dictates the movement of all things. The spirit of the creatures is in the wheel. Therefore, if the wheel is being moved from an outside force and the creature and wheels all move in perfect tandem, the meaning is that submission to God's plan is

our only option. Understand? This is the appearance of the glory of the Lord! Christian church, where is this teaching, have you not understood these things?

The voice (which we now understand is the voice of God) tells Ezekiel that He is sending him out to speak to the rebellious Israelites. He tells Ezekiel not to be afraid of them and to say to them all He tells him to say. Then He tells Ezekiel to eat what He gives him. Ezekiel explains that is when he saw an open scroll in a hand stretched out toward him. Both sides of the scroll were covered with words of lament, mourning, and woe. The voice again says to eat it and then to go and speak to the house of Israel. Ezekiel says he ate the scroll, and it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth. Then God tells him to go and speak to the people. He tells Ezekiel the people are hardened and obstinate and that they will not listen to him but again tells him not to fear them. Then Ezekiel went on his way with bitterness and anger in him. He says he returned to the other exiles he was with and for seven days sat in wonder of what happened. This story of the scroll is another reference to something we read more about in the revelation of Jesus. The same idea of the sweet tasting scroll which turns to bitterness in the stomach. When we reach a full understanding of God's plan it is very much like this. The sweet promise of God with the tinge of bitterness behind the truth. It can be difficult to accept, but as we learned in the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, everything according to God's plan. Every movement and action is put in place under His protection.

After the seven days passed, Ezekiel heard the voice call to him again telling him that his task was to go out and speak out against the Israelites. God explains to Ezekiel that if God tells him to warn someone of something and Ezekiel does not, God will hold Ezekiel accountable for it. He tells Ezekiel to meet Him in the plains nearby where Ezekiel again sees the likeness of the glory of the Lord just as he had by the river. God tells him to lock himself in his house and that God is going to stop him from speaking, but when the time comes for him to speak God will give him the words to say, saying to the people, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says". Then God tells him "Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house." Understand, are we listening or refusing?

Next God tasks Ezekiel with a strange assignment. He tells him to take a clay tablet and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. He tells him to lay siege to it by placing camps

and battering rams all around it. He then tells him to take an iron pan and place it as an iron wall between him and the city. He tells Ezekiel to lie on his left side and put the sin of the house of Israel on himself, that he will bear the sin of the people for the same number of days as the years of their sin, three hundred and ninety days for Israel and forty days for Judah. He tells Ezekiel to face the siege of Jerusalem and prophecy against it, including that he will be tied up with ropes until the days assigned are completed. God tells him to bring some food to make bread for him to eat while he is in this condition, adding that the food must be cooked over human excrement. Ezekiel pleads with God stating that he has never eaten unclean food to which God allows him to cook it over cow manure instead. Although an odd request, God explains this is all to represent to the people that God will put the city under siege and cut off the food supply causing the people to ration their food, eating in anxiety, and drinking rationed water in despair. He then tells Ezekiel to cut off his hair and beard and to divide the hair into three portions. At the end of the siege, he is to burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city, strike a third of the hair with a sword all around the city, and to scatter the remaining third of it to the wind. Again, God explains this is representative of how God will pursue them with the sword. But He tells Ezekiel to take a few strands of the hair and tuck them away in his garment. He says then to take a few of those strands and throw them into the fire, He says a fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel.

God goes on to explain this strange charade. He explains how Jerusalem has turned from Him so He will cause a third of the people to die by plague or perish by famine in the city, a third to fall by the sword outside the city, and a third to be scattered to the winds and pursued with drawn swords. Then God says He will be avenged and then they will know that the Lord has spoken in His zeal. He goes on to say how those who survive being cast out of the city will be in the mountains and even those in the mountains will be brought to vengeance. He states that the few who survive will turn back to God admitting that He is Lord over all.

This message is bleak and burdensome to the people, but we must understand one important portion of the message. Ezekiel was told to take a few strands of hair place them in his garment and to throw a few of those into the fire, that they will be the fire that spreads to the whole house of Israel. Herein lies the hope for us all. God never fully destroys His people, does He? We saw it with Noah during the flood, and we've

seen it repeatedly throughout the story since then. It remains true that God will not see His plan fail. God continues to show us He has faith in our ability to return to righteousness and that He knows despite the nature of His design, all things according to His purpose, as we saw in Ezekiel's vision, the time will come that we return our devotion to Him. It is shown throughout the story in small examples of groups of people such as those discussed in this passage. The small remnant which will survive this struggle will return to the Lord as He stated, on a grander scale. Have we returned to the Lord? Don't we still value our jewelry and put our focus on those things which may as well be Asherah poles? When will we determine we are all remnant of God's chosen people as shown through the story of Noah and return to the Lord? Understand!

Shortly after Ezekiel completes his task of laying on the ground besieging the clay tablet of Jerusalem and speaking the word of God to the people, he is given another vision as he is sitting with the elders of Judah who were in exile with him. Again, he saw the figure like a man who was like fire from the waist down and like glowing metal from the waist up. The figure reached out His hand to Ezekiel and lifted him up by his hair. It took him to Jerusalem in a vision of God to the entrance to the north gate of the inner court where Ezekiel tells us there was the idol that provokes jealousy. He says also there before him was the glory of the God of Israel, the same one he saw by the river and in the field. He says he was told to look north and when he did, he saw that idol of jealousy standing in the entrance north of the gate of the altar. God asks him if he sees the detestable things the house of Israel is doing here that will drive God from His sanctuary. Then He brings Ezekiel to the entrance to the court where He tells him to dig a hole in the wall. When Ezekiel does, he sees a doorway. When he goes into the doorway, he sees all kinds of detestable crawling animals there along with the elders of the house of Israel holding incense censers. God asks if he sees what the elders are doing in darkness at the shrine of their own idols. Then He brings him to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord where he sees women mourning for Tammuz. Tammuz is the Mesopotamian god of fertility. Another detestable act. Then He brings Ezekiel to the inner court of the house of the Lord where, at the entrance to the temple, are about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple bowing to the sun in the East. God says since the people are all performing such detestable acts, He will not pity or spare them.

God then calls for the guards of the city to come in with weapon in hand. Ezekiel says he saw six men come from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, weapons in hand, along with one man in linen with a writing kit. God tells the man in linen to put a mark on all who grieve and lament over the detestable acts which were occurring. Once the marks are made, he releases the guards to kill all others. Seeing this killing, Ezekiel asks if God will completely destroy the remnant of Israel in this way. God responds stating how great their sin is and adding "So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done." There is much to say about this temple vision, but we must understand more first. Ezekiel will later describe for us a new temple which will take much insight to understand.

From His throne above the expanse, which was over the cherubim, God tells the man in linen to take some of the burning coals from among the wheels below the cherubim and to spread them over the city. Ezekiel explains that the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. Then he tells us the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple, filling the temple as the court was filled with the radiance of the glory of the Lord. Ezekiel tells us the man in linen went in and stood next to one of the wheels while the cherubim reached down, collecting some coals, and placing them in the man's hands who then took it and went out. It then occurred to Ezekiel that there were four wheels and four cherubim, the exact same four figures he had seen in his previous visions by the river and in the field. Ezekiel has now been able to tell us that these figures are in fact cherubim. What do we know about cherubim at this point in the story? They were tasked with guarding the entrance to the garden of Eden, their representation was placed above the ark of the covenant as a symbol of protection, and as Ezekiel helped us to understand, they represent that- submission to God's plan is our only option. Yet this still does not give us full enlightenment to what God's ultimate plan is.

Ezekiel then tells us how the cherubim rose, and the wheels stayed by their side. Then the glory of the Lord departed from the temple and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim moved and stopped at the entrance to the east gate with the glory of the Lord above them. Outside of the gate Ezekiel saw some of the leaders of the people who God tells him are plotting evil. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against these men.

So, we have now heard how God cleansed the temple by sending His guards to kill those who loved the detestable acts, and how He put His cherubim as guard at the east gate keeping at bay those who were plotting evil and now God tells Ezekiel to spread the word of promised hope by saying, “Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in these countries where they have gone.” Followed with, “I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again. They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to the vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done, declares the sovereign Lord.” Then Ezekiel states that the glory of the Lord moved from there and stopped above a mountain east of the city. The spirit lifted Ezekiel and placed him with the exiles in Babylonia and the vision left him.

Ezekiel is next given another odd task to perform. God tells him to pack his belongings for exile during the day while all are watching him, then in the nighttime to dig his way through the wall and walk out as they all watch with his eyes covered so he cannot see where he is going. Ezekiel does this and after he leaves, God questions if anyone asked him what he was doing, of course knowing no one did. Therefore, God tells Ezekiel to inform the people that in this same way the prince of Israel will be taken out through a hole dug in the wall into exile with his belongings on his shoulder. He will be brought to Babylonia without seeing it and there he will die. God also says He will scatter everyone around him and disperse them among the nations. He goes on to inform Ezekiel that the people will say this is for a time to come by saying a common phrase among them, “The days go by and every vision comes to nothing?” but they are wrong and that this action is to take place without delay.

Ezekiel’s message continues by condemning false prophets, idolators, entire countries who sin against God, and Jerusalem. God tells Ezekiel to draw a line in the road and to split the line, one heading in the direction of the Ammonites, and the other in the direction of Jerusalem. God tells Ezekiel that the king of Babylon will stop at the fork in the road, consult his seers and determine which to take. The road will lead him

to Judah and Jerusalem, and the Ammonites will boast over it. However, this is directly followed by a prophecy against the Ammonites condemning their boasts and prophesying their ultimate destruction at the hands of brutal men.

During this time of Ezekiel, Jehoiachin had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar as we have already read, and sometime later, Jehoiachin got released from that Babylonian prison and received a seat of honor in Babylon. But while Jehoiachin was a prisoner, Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah king in his place and changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah. He was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he would be the last king of Judah.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon, and because of this, Nebuchadnezzar marched out against him. So, Zedekiah reached out to Jeremiah hoping God would help intervene against the Babylonians. But the answer he received from Jeremiah was not a favorable one. He told the king how God informed them He was determined to fight against the people of Judah Himself, even handing over king Zedekiah to Babylon.

At this time Ezekiel tells us he was informed by God that the city of Jerusalem was now under siege by the king of Babylon. Ezekiel gives the people the warning message from God, but in order to give the message in its fullness, Ezekiel is going to suffer a loss. God tells Ezekiel He is going to take Ezekiel's wife from him. And He tells Ezekiel not to lament or shed any tears about it. He tells Ezekiel not to partake in any of the typical grieving traditions. Ezekiel says he spoke to the people in the morning and that evening his wife died. He says the next day he did as God commanded ignoring the grieving customs. The people ask what this has to do with them to which Ezekiel explains God's message in it. He tells them how God has stated He will desecrate His sanctuary, which they take pride in, the object of their affection including their sons and daughters falling by the sword. Ezekiel tells them they will act just as he has, not following the customs of grieving and they will waste away because of their sins. Understand God tasked Ezekiel with shouldering this great grief just as the people were going to have to do. God reinforces the *understanding* by telling them this will be a sign to them, when they see it come to pass, that He is the sovereign Lord.

It's not only the people of Israel and Judah that Ezekiel prophesies against. The downfall was set in motion for Jerusalem, but Ezekiel also prophesied against the people of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt, all the lands and peoples who fought so terribly against God's chosen people over all the years. God has pronounced how all of their wickedness will bring them to ruin. It is also important to note here that for some of the nations which Ezekiel is prophesying against, God tells them they will be scattered among the nations and included in the return someday. How much more evident can it be that we are all God's chosen people?

Meanwhile, Jeremiah had a vision of two baskets of figs. One basket was full of good figs and the other was full of bad ones which could not be eaten. God asked Jeremiah what he saw, and Jeremiah told Him about the fig baskets he saw. God explained that the Judeans who were taken to Babylon and went along were like the good fruit which God would take care of. God says He will plant them and not uproot them. The other Judeans who did not follow God's command to be taken by the Babylonians were the bad fruit which God would make abhorrent to all the kingdoms.

Jeremiah receives word from God that the people will be captive with the Babylonians for seventy years and after that God will destroy Babylon. Furthermore, God tells Jeremiah to have the nations drink from His cup. God says to have all mankind drink, get drunk, vomit, and rise no more. God says His meaning is that He will call a sword down on all the people of the Earth.

Jeremiah also was told to make a yoke and put it on his neck and then to tell all the kings of the land that it is God's command for them to submit to the yoke of the Babylonians. God warns the people that if they do not, He will bring destruction down on them. He also tells them that the items from the Lord's temple which had not been taken when Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin, would be taken to Babylon and kept there until the time when the Lord comes and restores them. Think of a time when we have disciplined our children or been disciplined by our parents, the punishment is handed out with a statement that if the punishment is not adhered to, there will be worse punishment. This is the message God was giving the people.

Jeremiah, as did Ezekiel, warns the people of false prophets who only say good things the people want to hear and do not tell the truth. He wrote a letter to the people

who were exiled into Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jehoiachin to Babylon. In it he warns them that although some prophets will tell them they will be redeemed quickly, not to believe it because the Lord has said they will be in exile for some time. They are instructed to go along with the requirements put on them by the Babylonians. But he also gives the people some hope as he is told by God to write about the coming days when God will raise a new leader from the people and bring them back to the land. God says, "I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning:" Remember Ephraim was one of Joseph's sons who he had in Egypt, and his name means fruitful in the land of suffering. This is Ephraim's moaning, "'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to *understand*, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.' Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?" God also says, "Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant." Understand.

As Nebuchadnezzar was attacking Jerusalem, Jeremiah was confined by king Zedekiah to the courtyard of the guard. The word of God came to Jeremiah and told him that his uncle would offer to sell him a field in the land of Judah, in an area that was currently being overthrown by Babylon. Jeremiah doesn't understand why God is telling him to buy a field in a land that is being laid to waste. To which God responds that Jeremiah should place the bill of sale into a clay jar and tuck it away for safe keeping as a reminder that God will return the people to the land. Also, while confined in the courtyard, Jeremiah receives another message from God reiterating that He has made a covenant to gather the people back to the land.

God told Jeremiah to tell King Zedekiah that although He was going to allow Babylon to overthrow them, He would not make Zedekiah suffer, He told him that He would allow him a peaceful death and that his name would be remembered. However, the very next story Jeremiah gives us is that Zedekiah ordered all of the slaves in the land to be freed. The people agreed but shortly after, they all took back their slaves. For this, God would relent from the grace He was going to show Zedekiah.

Next Jeremiah tells us an interesting story about a group of Recabites. Jeremiah invites them into his house and offers them wine to drink. They refuse, telling

Jeremiah that their forefather Jonadab who helped king Jehu eliminate the house of king Ahab, had given them instruction not to drink wine as well as not to build houses or to plant vineyards along with a few other things. God gives Jeremiah a message for them stating that although they obey the commands of their forefather, they do not obey the commands of God. He states that He will bring disaster on all the people of Judah including them. When delivering the message to the Recabites, Jeremiah tells them God said they have obeyed their forefather therefore, "Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me." Understand this is not a blessing on the Recabites, instead it has deeper meaning. Jonadab clearly had the respect of his family lineage. They obeyed his commands even centuries after his death. God is saying that if we can get our subsequent generations to follow God's commands in the same way Jonadab had gotten his to follow his command, then Jonadab would never fail to have a man to serve God. Understand.

Zedekiah really had it in for Jeremiah. He had him held in the courtyard of the guard because of his prophecies. He even had him thrown into a cistern from which he was saved by a Cushite official. Zedekiah again confronts Jeremiah wanting to ask him something. He swears to Jeremiah that he will not kill him. Jeremiah tells him God has said if he surrenders to Babylon, God will spare his life and his family will live, but if not, he and his family will be handed over to the Babylonians, and the city will be completely destroyed. Zedekiah stated he was afraid the Babylonians would hand him over to the Jews who had already entered exile in Babylon, and they would mistreat him. It is important to note another transition in the timeline of things here. Up to this point in the story, God's people have been referred to as God's people, Israelites, and Judeans. Now that they no longer would hold the land of Israel or Judah, they would start to be known as Jews. Jeremiah tells him that if he will just obey the Lord, then he does not need to fear being handed over to them. Zedekiah told Jeremiah to keep this conversation secret, which Jeremiah did. And he stayed captive in the courtyard until the day the Babylonians overthrew the city.

Ezekiel tells us at this time that the word of the Lord came to him one night speaking out against the people of Jerusalem again denouncing their sinful ways. As part of this message God gives us important insight which is mirrored in today's life. He is speaking of how the people are saying to each other to go and hear the message of God from Ezekiel, "My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen

to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument as well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice." Doesn't this sound so similar to our culture today, everyone running to church to hear God's message but not putting it into practice? Christian church, why do your teachings fail?

The next morning Ezekiel tells us that a man who survived and escaped from Jerusalem comes and tells Ezekiel the city has fallen.

Nebuchadnezzar brought his whole army to attack Jerusalem. They set up siege works all around the city and eventually broke through the wall. When they did, Zedekiah and the rest of the army with him fled out through a gate. As they were fleeing, the Babylonians caught up to them and king Zedekiah was captured and brought to king Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians killed Zedekiah's sons in front of him as he watched, then they carved out his eyes, bound him and took him to Babylon where he was imprisoned until he died. This fulfilled the prophecy Ezekiel gave stating that the prince of Israel would be led out through the wall into Babylon but would not see it and would die there. Meanwhile the commander of Babylon's imperial guard burned down every important building in Jerusalem. They also took the rest of the people into exile from the land, leaving very few of the poorest people to work in the fields. They took everything from the Lord's temple and carried it away. Nebuchadnezzar had left one man in charge of the people who were left behind, but that man was killed and out of fear, the people fled hoping to find safety in Egypt.

Jeremiah was protected from this onslaught as Nebuchadnezzar had told his officials not to let harm come to him. Jeremiah decided to stay with the remnant of the people and was consulted by them as they decided where to go. Jeremiah gave them God's answer telling them that if they stayed in the land with the Babylonians things would be good for them, but if they go to Egypt, then they will die there. But the people didn't believe him and continued to Egypt anyway. God sends a message to Jeremiah telling the people that now He will allow Nebuchadnezzar to extend the Babylonian empire all the way to Egypt. The people went back to worshipping other gods when they got to Egypt. God gave them a stern message through Jeremiah telling them that they would all die in Egypt, except only a few who would escape and return to the land

of Judah. Jeremiah finishes his writing to us giving a message about the downfall of Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, Elam, and Babylon.

The land of Israel and Judah had now been completely taken. The field was tilled, and the seed was beginning to be disbursed.

Sowing of the seeds

After the fall of Jerusalem, king Nebuchadnezzar died, and his son Belshazzar took the throne in Babylon. In the first year of king Belshazzar's rule, Daniel had a dream of four beasts which are four kingdoms that will rise from the Earth. Here is another story that meets much debate and controversy. However, when we break it down, we can reach *understanding*. Daniel explains how he saw the four winds of heaven churning up the sea and four beasts coming up out of the sea. The sea represents mankind. The first beast was like a lion which had the wings of an eagle. Its wings were torn off, and it was lifted up so that it stood on two feet like a man, and he tells us the heart of man was given to it. The lion represents power, the wings which were torn off represent swiftness and protection which then cause it to stand on its own two feet like man, meaning its actions were that of man and its heart was turned to that of man as well. So, we have someone with a slow rise to power through the actions of man. This is representative of the ruling factor of those times, monarchy.

The next beast looked like a bear which was raised up on its side with three ribs between its teeth. It is told to "Get up and eat your fill of flesh!" The bear represents a wicked ruler. Being on its side represents that it has no fear, it can lie down and be comfortable. The three ribs represent God and the prophets, and the teeth represent weapons of speech. So, this beast represents a wicked ruler, without fear, able to destroy God and the prophets with its weapons of speech. And it is permitted to war as it is told to get up and eat its fill of flesh. This is representative of aristocracy as it was coming into being around that time.

The third beast looked like a leopard and had four wings like those of a bird on its back. It had four heads and was given authority to rule. The leopard is a sneaky predator. The four wings represent worldwide protection, however, being of a bird means that they are deceitful. The four heads represent the worldwide authority to rule. So, we have a sneaky predator that gets its protection to rule deceitfully. This is representative of democracy. Something which at that time was yet to come into full being.

The fourth and final beast was described as terrifying, frightening, and very powerful with large iron teeth to crush and devour its victims. It trampled underfoot whatever was left. Daniel tells us it was different from the other beasts and had ten horns. Then Daniel says that as he was thinking about the ten horns, a little horn came up

among them and uprooted three of them. He says this horn had eyes like a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Since we know Daniel was told these four beasts represent four kingdoms that will rise from the Earth, and we know the first three were monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, it is easy to determine what this fourth terrifying beast represents, oligarchy. There was no way for Daniel to understand this beast, it makes sense that he was so confounded by it. Amazingly, there are ten main oligarchy's which exist in our time today. Soon, three will be uprooted by a new horn. Think it through, understand. This beast gets control of everything. We are well on our way to this.

But this is not the end of Daniel's vision, he goes on to tell us that he saw the Ancient of Days sitting on His throne with a river of fire flowing from Him and ten thousand times ten thousand people standing before Him. Daniel says, "The court was seated, and the books were opened." Then he tells us he continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking, and he says he kept looking until the beast was slain and thrown into the river of fire. He says the other beasts were stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time. Then he saw what he calls "one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven." This of course refers to Jesus. Daniel says Jesus went near God and was given authority and all people worshipped Him. What should we understand from this? Our love of money which has created this beast representative of Oligarchy will be destroyed by God. The other beasts representing the different forms of leadership we have created over the years will remain for a while until the return of Jesus when He will be given full authority. Our understanding of this cannot be complete yet. The story continues. This is a vision of something yet to come.

Daniel then gives us another vision he received during the reign of Belshazzar. In this vision Daniel sees he is beside the Ulai Canal. He tells us that when he looked up, he saw a ram with two horns. He tells us he saw the ram charging north, south, and west, and no one was able to stand against it. He says the ram did as it saw fit and became great. Then Daniel tells us as he was thinking about this ram, a goat suddenly appeared from the west with a prominent horn between its eyes. He details that it was crossing the whole Earth without touching the ground, meaning without resistance. He tells us the goat came toward the ram and attacked it furiously, shattering its horns. The goat knocked the ram to the ground and trampled it. He says the goat became

very great but at the height of its power, the prominent horn was broken off, and four horns grew up in its place. He tells us that out of one of these horns came another one which started small but grew in power to the south and the east. He says it grew until it reached the host of heaven and trampled on them. He says it set itself up to be "…as great as the Prince of the Host." He tells us it took away the daily sacrifice and brought low God's sanctuary. He says, "It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground." A voice tells Daniel it will be two thousand three hundred evenings before the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.

Daniel tells us that the angel Gabriel was told to give him the meaning of this vision of the ram and the goat. He is told the vision concerns the time of the end. In simple explanation he tells Daniel the ram with the two horns represented the kings of Media and Persia. He goes further to explain the goat represents the king of Greece and the one horn represents the first king. Then he no longer tells us which people are represented but instead explains that the four horns which replace the one on the goat represent four kingdoms which will emerge from Greece but not have the same power. We know today what these kingdoms are, Roman, Arab, Turk, and British. The angel Gabriel goes on to explain that in the later years of the reign of these kingdoms, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king who is a master of intrigue will rise. He says he will become very strong but not by his own power. He tells us that this king will cause devastation and succeed in whatever he does. He says it will destroy mighty men and holy people, will cause deceit to prosper, and consider himself superior. Finally, he tells us that eventually it will be destroyed but not by human power. Gabriel tells Daniel to seal up this vision as it is for the end times.

We have to ask ourselves, what does this final horn represent? What came from the four nations, started small and grew into great power considering itself superior? Could this not be America? Did it not start small and grow into power using deception? Does it not grow in power to the south and to the east? Is it not setting itself up to be as great as the Prince of the Host? It claims to be one nation under God, but do the actions of the nation reflect this? It is just as important to understand that this horn does not need to represent America- the country, but more so the modern western culture which is quickly sweeping its way over the whole Earth. However, we must still understand. There is no directive telling us to take action against America. This is stated to be part of God's plan! Everything according to His will. We must reach

understanding before we discern action! We can now unseal this vision, but in doing so, we must have full *understanding*. At this point in the story, we do not.

One day Belshazzar gathered up a bunch of the nobles for a banquet. They had the gold and silver goblets brought in which his father had taken from the temple of the Lord when he attacked Jerusalem. They wanted to use them to drink from. As they did, they worshipped and praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Suddenly a hand appeared and wrote a message on one of the walls as they all watched in fear. The message read "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN". King Belshazzar along with the others were perplexed and could not decipher what the meaning was. The king decreed that whoever could interpret the message would be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom. The queen happened to hear them and offered a suggestion to have Daniel come in and interpret the message for them. Knowing how well Daniel interpreted things for Nebuchadnezzar, they thought this was a good idea and so they had him brought in. Daniel was able to decipher the message for them and gave them the meaning. "MENE"-translates as numbered, meant God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign. "TEKEL"-translates as weighed, meant Belshazzar had been weighed on the scales and found wanting. "PERES"-is the singular of Parsin translated as divided and meant that his kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar made Daniel the third highest ruler in the land for this interpretation, and that very night, Belshazzar was slain, making Darius the Mede king in his place. Therefore, the kingdom now belonged to the Medes and Persians.

Ezekiel's final message to us describes a new temple construction and the message comes during the time of Belshazzar's reign. We know this because Ezekiel tells us it was during the fourteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem. But in his writing, just before he gets to this message, he tells us about a couple of other visions he had. These visions run together with the vision of the new temple, so we need to start with the first message. This first part of his final message is a prophecy to the mountains of Israel. In it he tells us that God tasked him with prophesying to the mountains of Israel by saying to them, "The enemy said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.'" God is stating through the message that He is bothered by the way people have taken His land, the mountains of Israel as a symbol, and called it their own, desolating and plundering it. Therefore, God says He has spoken against the rest of the nations. The prophecy to the mountains of Israel is that they will bear fruit for God's

people because His people will soon come home to the land. He tells the land, it will be plowed and sown and that He will multiply the people and animals on it, "even the whole house of Israel." He says He will settle people on it again as in the past, and make the land prosper more than before. He goes on to tell the land it will be the inheritance for the people, and it will never again deprive them of their children. God explains that when the Israelites had the land, they defiled it, so God dispersed them among the nations, where they in turn profaned God's name, stating that they were not allowed to keep the land because of God rather than admitting their own fault in it. God tells the people it is not for their sake, He is doing this, but for the sake of His holy name so that He cannot be blasphemed any longer by this thinking. He states that He will call the people back to the land and make the land plentiful for them. He states that those in the nations around will see the fruitfulness of the land and know that the Lord was the one who brought it back. This is important in our *understanding*.

In the next part of Ezekiel's final message to us, God brings him to a valley which is covered in dry bones. God asks Ezekiel if the bones can live, to which Ezekiel replies that only God knows. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones stating that God will put tendons on them, add flesh to them, put skin on them, and breathe life back into them so that the bones would know God is the Lord. Ezekiel did as he was asked, and the bones came together with tendons, flesh, and skin, but no breath. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath to come from the four winds and enter them. He does and they came to life and stood on their feet. God explains the bones represent the people of Israel and that He will restore them as in this vision. He states the people feel like this pile of bones, but that God will bring them back, so they know He is the Lord. We have to question why God has not done this yet. But we have the answer, we already know that God will not bring the people back until His plan is fulfilled. Understand!

Next in the message God tells Ezekiel to take a stick and to write on it, "Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him." Then on a second stick to write, "Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him." Then God tells Ezekiel to tie the two sticks together making them one in his hand. Let's refresh our memory, Ephraim was the son of Joseph making him a grandson of Israel. As we learned, his name meant- fruitful in the land of suffering. This was the opposite of his brother Manasseh whose name meant- to forget all his troubles and his father's

house. It is interesting that this stick would hold the name meaning- fruitful in the land of suffering. God tells Ezekiel to explain to those who ask that the combining of the sticks represents how God will bring His people together as one. He will return them to the land as one people where they will live under an everlasting covenant.

The next part of the message has to do with a nation God refers to as Gog. Through this message God explains how Gog is the nation that will oppose His returning people. We need to understand Gog as something more than just a country or a government. It is more than that, it is the culmination of many. God tells Ezekiel that He will return His people to the land and as they prosper there, Gog will become increasingly bothered by them. He states Gog will attack the defenseless people with full force, an army made up of many nations. The army will come from the north, God is stating He will cause the army of Gog to go against His people so that He can show His glory to all people, and on that day, God will cause an earthquake unlike any ever known to mankind. He states that the army of Gog will be completely destroyed by this event. He goes on to say that the people will all know God is the Lord on that day. The remaining people will not need to obtain wood from the forest for many years because they will use the weapons of Gog as fuel. God has Ezekiel prophesy to the birds, telling them to prepare for the feast they will have on the dead bodies of the army of Gog. He also tells how there will be a great burial field where the dead will be buried, stating that survivors will go out and bury the dead every day for seven months to clean the land. The final part of this message reads in the words of God, “I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name. They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my spirit on the house of Israel,”

This all leads us into the vision of the temple. Ezekiel’s temple vision is another which sparks great debate. First, we must understand the temple. We must understand what a temple was intended for. In all the different worshipping practices, the

purpose of any temple was to encourage the god to dwell with the people there. In our belief in the one true God, the purpose is to encourage God to dwell with us. The temple which Solomon built to house the ark of the covenant, where God dwelt with the people, was ransacked, and destroyed when the Babylonians took over the city. Although we are not to it in the story yet, the people will be allowed to rebuild the temple. Later, during Jesus' time, He finds the temple turned into a marketplace and reprimands the people for it. However, this is still not the temple Ezekiel is describing to us. The temple in Ezekiel's vision is one intended for a future time. At the time of this writing, it has not yet been built. As Ezekiel describes his vision to us, he goes into great detail regarding the measurements of the temple, its design and construction, its gateways, and its orientation. The most important thing for us to understand at this time is the symbolism of this temple.

Starting with the orientation of the temple, we can begin to understand. The temple faces to the east. There is an entrance to the east, one to the north and one to the south. The west side does not have an entrance. Let's begin there. What do we know about the east? We know the entrance to the garden of Eden was to the east. We also hear in Ezekiel's description of the temple that he sees the Glory of the Lord coming from the east. However, we are also told that the east entrance is not to be used. Once the Glory of the Lord enters here the gate is to be shut and not to be opened again. Think of this direction to the east as the direction we are facing. Our left hand is now to the north, and our right hand is now to the south. The west would now be behind us. Facing east puts our path toward the Glory of the Lord. If the path of our life is truly directed toward the Glory of the Lord, then whether we act with intention, as symbolized by our right hand, or act unintentionally as symbolized by our left hand, we can be assured our actions work toward the purpose of allowing God to lead our lives. Later in the vision Ezekiel explains to us that those who enter from the north must exit through the south, and those who enter through the south must exit through the north gate. If we unintentionally stumble into the temple through the north, left hand, discovering God inside, we can say with intention that we choose to exit the south, right hand. If we intentionally enter the temple through the south, right, looking for God, we may unintentionally exit the north, left. But if we intentionally enter, we cannot intentionally leave, or we are refusing God who is within. If we unintentionally enter, we do find God because it was done without intention on our part meaning it was done by God so He was found, and once found at God's will, we cannot

unintentionally leave Him. This furthers our *understanding* proving that our actions would be working toward God's glory as long as we accept Him into our temple. The abomination which causes desolation is placed on the north wing of the temple. Understand this abomination has placed itself on our unintentional actions. When we accept God into our temple, that abomination can no longer stand. The west end is behind us; it is the gallery. It is what has happened in our lives which must lead us to direct ourselves to the Lord. We are the temple. Understand.

God tells Ezekiel to say to the people "Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider the plan, and if they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the design of the temple- its arrangement, its exits and entrances- its whole design and all its regulations and laws." It is not at this time that we need to understand the full detail of the temple. That time is yet to come. But for our time now, we need to understand the design of the temple, how it represents our intention in life. The way it symbolizes our acceptance of God at the center of our lives directly allowing Him in from the direction we face by following the path God set before us. We need to understand the abomination on the north wing and the way to rid ourselves of it.

Church leaders, has this understanding of the temple been lost over the years? Why is it not spoken of? Here is the message Ezekiel was told by God to share with you, the rebellious house of Israel, "Enough of your detestable practices, O house of Israel! In addition to all your other detestable practices, you brought foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into my sanctuary, desecrating my temple while you offered me food, fat and blood, and you broke my covenant. Instead of carrying out your duty in regard to my holy things, you put others in charge of my sanctuary." Return to the Lord, revive the message. Reach *understanding* and repent of your practices. We may say this message was for the Israelites of that time and circumstance, but it is not only a message for them. Understand its meaning.

Ezekiel's message of this vision goes into the details of the workings of this new temple. He tells of the rules we are meant to follow at the time the temple is built after the return of the people to the promised land. They are meant to show God our intentions are working toward bringing glory to His name and our intent to walk in all His ways; to show Him our *understanding*. Ezekiel explains to us that in his vision he saw

a river flowing out from the temple. It starts from the south side of the inner temple and flows out through the east gate. Ezekiel explains how the river deepens as it progresses. This is the river of life. He explains how all the vegetation growing along the river is abundant and provides its fruit monthly. Imagine a garden with plants that sustain us year-round. How wonderful it would be. But this river is not present until the glory of the Lord rests on the temple, and the people are living according to God's direction. Adam and Eve ate the fruit desiring the knowledge of good and evil and thus were expelled from the garden. Are we now seeing that having the knowledge of good and evil and knowing how to discern the choice for good expels wickedness and returns the garden to us?

The final part of Ezekiel's message regarding the vision of the temple has to do with the distribution of the land to God's people. Again, this is something we are yet to understand, and we will when the time comes. He ends his message to us in total by telling us the name of the new city, "The Lord is there".

During the first year of king Darius's reign while Daniel was praying for the people who were now exiled and spread throughout the kingdoms, he was visited again by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel begins by telling Daniel he has come to give him insight and *understanding*. He tells Daniel, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." He furthers this message by telling Daniel that from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed one comes will be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens". Let's first understand this message before we continue. This is the key to our understanding. The seven "sevens" represents a time that the people will be in alignment with God which as stated will occur when the decree to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem is issued. Although we haven't read that in the story yet, that is what happens under the rule of Cyrus the Persian king. Then there will be sixty-two "sevens". This is to represent a time period when the people will be divided. Six representing man and two in this case representing division. This comes to pass as well since after Cyrus, there are those who try to stop the rebuilding efforts.

Gabriel goes on to tell Daniel it will be rebuilt but in times of trouble, this is also true. This we were told were the "sevens" which precede the anointed one coming.

This would be a reference to Jesus. Then he tells Daniel that after the sixty-two "sevens" the anointed one will be cut off and have nothing. He goes on to say, "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." Adding, "The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed." Still speaking of this ruler, he says, "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." So, we can clearly tell that the "sevens" don't represent a set amount of time but are symbolic of a type of time to occur. This final seven happens after Jesus has been cut off from this life. The ruler who causes all of this can be argued over if you like, however when we take a step back and realize we are still in this final "seven" we know this ruler is still in place, still with the abomination standing in the temple. This ruler is evil, is it not? We can understand this better later in the text, but in our effort to understand this vision of the "sevens" we need to know this ruler is Satan. In the middle of the final "seven" we are told this ruler will put an end to sacrifice and offering. This is the case today, sacrifice and offering have no true place in our society. Perhaps they should. Perhaps we need to understand everything in full and search within ourselves for the meaning here. What do we interpret the abomination on the wing of the temple to be? As we discovered in Ezekiel's vision it comes from our actions taken without intention. It continues to sneak its way in among our actions hidden from us by our own desires.

King Darius was pleased with Daniel's work in leadership over the kingdom, having the third highest seat. Therefore, he intended to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom. This caused the other administrators and satraps to look for reasons for filing charges against Daniel, but they were unable to do so since he was doing no wrong. So, they went to the king and asked him to issue a decree that any man who prays to any god or man other than the king over the next thirty days should be thrown into the lion's den. The king agreed and issued the decree. Daniel was still devoted to God and would pray in his room three times a day facing Jerusalem. The men knew it and caught him praying even though Daniel also had heard the decree. The men brought it to king Darius's attention and since the decree could not be reversed, the king had to follow through with it, despite his efforts not to. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. They placed a stone over the entrance to the den and sealed it with the king's signet. The next morning the king rushed out to the den and called to Daniel asking if

his God was able to save him from the lions to which Daniel responded that God found no fault in him and had saved his life. They lifted Daniel out of the den and in punishment for their false accusation, the men who accused Daniel along with their wives and children were thrown into the den. Before their bodies even hit the floor, the lions had crushed their bones. After that, king Darius issued a decree that people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. Daniel then prospered during the reign of Darius and of Cyrus the Persian.

The book of Lamentations gives poetic insight into the feelings of the people having been torn from their homeland, forced to witness its destruction. It is important to our *understanding* for us to realize the parallels between our modern society and the society of the Israelites in that time. Are we following God's direction any closer than they were? Should we expect any different result than that of the people at that time? The prophets spoke of the coming messiah, the one who would fulfill the law and reveal the full measure of *understanding*. But the people weren't ready. They preferred rituals over relationships, power over purity, and tradition over truth. Don't we also? In other words, all this time, we have held the form of faith but missed its substance.

The veiled return

The pattern completes again; misunderstanding led to destruction, yet even in exile, God prepares renewal.

Although Cyrus was a Persian, he still maintained the title “King of Babylon”. It is during his reign that the story of Ezra begins, and the message Daniel had for us ends. It is now seventy years since the fall of Jerusalem and as God promised through the prophet Jeremiah, the people were allowed to return to the land. Cyrus the king of Persia stated that since God gave him all kingdoms, he was appointed to build a temple to God in Jerusalem. He not only told the people they were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but he also told everyone to provide them with gifts, supplies, and assistance as needed. They even returned any articles which had been taken from the original temple. Many people have confused this return over the years. They consider this return as the prophesied return of the end times. However, we know this is not true. That prophecy is for the end times. Clearly this was not the end times as earthly life continues today. The end times prophesied return of God’s people to the promised land happens when people repent of their sins and God brings them back from all corners of the Earth, not because a leader told them they could and just from the neighboring nation. The seeds were sown; the people were scattered. This return ensures God’s message does not get lost. We will see through the last of the prophet’s messages how this event unfolds to bring us to our current state of things. It will usher in the arrival of Jesus and serve its purpose in God’s plan to keep His message alive.

Daniel’s last message to us is his telling of a vision he had concerning a great war which troubled him. It is a confusing passage for us as we get caught up in trying to understand the king of the north and the king of the south. We spend countless hours debating which of the great kings in history are being referenced. We seem to be so focused on those details that we miss the point of the story. What we can know is that the story of the warring kings clearly represents groups of people consistently fighting for power over each other. Daniel tells us that after receiving the vision he mourned for three weeks, not eating or drinking any choice items and not using any lotions. Understand he was refusing to give in to his desires. Daniel then tells us that he was visited by a figure dressed in linen with a belt of gold. He tells us the figure’s body was like chrysolite, His face like lightning, His eyes like flaming torches, His arms and legs like burning bronze, and His voice was like the sound of a multitude. The man tries to

comfort Daniel by reassuring him, making a statement which is profound, “Since the first day that you set your mind to gain *understanding* and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.” Understand. He tells Daniel He is there to inform him of what will happen to the people in the future.

The messenger begins by telling Daniel three more kings will appear in Persia followed by a fourth, who would be far richer than the others and would stir everyone up against Greece. Then He says a mighty king will appear and after that king appears, the empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. He then says the king of the south will become strong but one of his commanders will rule the kingdom and later they will become allies. He tells how the daughter of the king of the south will go to the king of the north to form an alliance, but that power will not last. He says one from her family line will take her place and attack the king of the north and be victorious. He says the south will take all the treasures from the north back to Egypt. Then years later the north will invade the south but retreat and then the sons of that king of the north will prepare a large army for war which will sweep on like a flood. He then says the king of the south will rage against the north and defeat them in battle causing the south to become prideful. But He says the king of the north will raise an even larger army after several years and advance against the king of the south again. He tells how at that time many will rise against the king of the south, even those in the south rebelling against their own king but without success. He says the king of the north will capture a fortified city leaving the south powerless and establishing himself in “the beautiful land” with the power to destroy it. He will come with his entire kingdom and make an alliance with the king of the south. He will give his daughter in marriage to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed. He then turns his attention to the coastland, but a commander will stop him and turn him back to his fortress in his own country, where he falls to be seen no more. The man then tells Daniel the successor to the fallen king of the north will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. This is the beginning of the Hellenistic period. However, in a few years he too will be destroyed. He will be succeeded by a contemptable person who will invade the kingdom and seize it through intrigue. Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him and destroyed along with a prince of the covenant. We can understand this to be Jesus. It is becoming clear that at this point Rome is represented by the king of the north. He says the south will come to an

agreement with him, but he will act deceitfully and with only a few people will rise to power. He tells Daniel that when the richest provinces feel secure, this king of the north will invade them and do what his forefathers never did, distribute the plunder among his followers. Now with a large army he will go against the king of the south and although the south now has a large army as well, he will not be able to stand because of the plots against him. The messenger says the two kings will sit at the same table and lie to each other to no avail "because an end will still come at the appointed time." The king of the north will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. "At the appointed time he will invade the south again," but the messenger goes on to say this time it will be different as ships from the coast will oppose him, turning him back to vent his fury against the covenant. His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and abolish the daily sacrifice. "Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will come at the appointed time." This portion goes well into their future speaking of the missionaries who would spread the word of God over the whole Earth.

But what is the abomination which causes desolation? It is hinted to, as we understand the division of the land at a price, the taxing of the people, the sneaky intrigue used to get the people to follow along, the distribution of the wealth among them, all with the hidden intent to go against the holy covenant. We know from Ezekiel's temple vision that the south represents our intended actions, and the north represents the unintended actions. What are the north and the south battling over? They are fighting for power over the land and the people in it. Is this battle for power so far off from the understanding of Ezekiel's temple vision? Doesn't Ezekiel's temple give us insight into how to stop this never-ending war? Don't we now understand how to take down the abomination which has been set up on the north wing of the temple? The abomination is the result of our desire to give everyone everything they desire. It is this very thing which causes our desolation today. We have pushed the idea that every man, woman, and child on Earth can have everything they ever wanted and somehow do this in a sustainable way. Yet, this is the very thing which desolates the planet and causes so

much despair among us. When we break it all down to its core issue, every terrible thing that we witness, or experience boils down to the satisfaction of the desires of either ourselves or another. Does it matter who these kings are from our history books, or does it matter more that we can understand the meaning behind the vision, the setting up of the abomination? Consider how Daniel tells us that when he had this vision, he stopped enjoying choice food and drink and lotions. He understood the setting up of the abomination and no longer wanted to feed it. Church leaders, why isn't this addressed? What do you teach people about these visions? We must understand! The king of nothing has no crown. The King of everything, our God, is a crown for all to bear.

Daniel goes on to tell us the rest of the message given to him. He states that this king of the north will put himself above any gods and will be successful until the time of wrath is completed. This clearly tells us that this king is not one man. Is the time of wrath completed even now? Didn't we just discover that the abomination is still in place? But we should understand the full quote here, "He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place." Does this give us insight into what God's ultimate plan is? He continues the message to tell us that at the time of the end; the king of the south will once again engage the king of the north in battle and that the king of the north will invade many countries sweeping through like a flood. He will even invade the beautiful land. He says many countries will fall but Edom, Moab, and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from him. Let's understand Edom descended from Esau who as we know was the twin brother of Jacob and fought with him for the right to his family's inheritance. Moab and Ammon were descended from Lot's sons remembering they came from the deceitful acts of Lot's daughters after getting him drunk. So those who are spared by this king of the north are those who descended from the deceitful. Understand. The messenger tells Daniel, the king of the north will have power over many countries but reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out with great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his tent at the holy mountain between the seas, but he will come to his end, and no one will help him. He says, "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people- everyone whose name is found written in the book- will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the Earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to

shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." And hasn't our knowledge increased ever so much. The time is now for us to understand!

Daniel then tells us he saw two more figures, and one asked the messenger, who had been speaking to Daniel, how long it would be until these things happen. Another passage of much debate. It is stated throughout the bible that no one knows when the end times will come. The answer given in this vision is another which requires understanding. He says "It will be for a time, times and a half a time. When the power of the people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." A time, times, and a half a time is a confusing statement. The number three is symbolic of the resurrection, and half means incomplete. We can understand this to mean that it will be a period of time prior to the complete resurrection. Another way we can look at it is to say that there will be a time, let's say the timeline of the story up to this point. Then times, let's say the troubling times we as humans have faced since then. And half a time, which perhaps is upcoming. Daniel didn't understand what this meant either, so he asked for clarification. The response he got was "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will *understand*, but those who are wise will *understand*." Understand! He continues, "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination which causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of 1,335 days." This helps our understanding. We need to break these numbers down into their symbolism. One thousand- symbolizes many, typically together in unity. Two- represents witness. Nine- represents judgment. And zero- represents completeness. So, 1,290 days, knowing that a day to God does not abide by our calendar or concept of time, symbolizes many witnessing judgement. 1,335 days obviously holds a different meaning. One thousand- is still many, typically together in unity. Three- represents the trinity and resurrection. Five- represents the restoration of restitution and fairness. So, blessed are those who reach the end of- many together in unity, in the resurrection with the trinity, as fairness is restored. How long will it take for these outcomes to be reached? How long until we are all judged, and how long until those who are found worthy are resurrected into a life where fairness is restored?

Surely, a time has passed. Surely, times are coming to a close. When will the power of the people be finally broken? When will we learn the truth about the abomination? No one knows this timeline. Yet, all of us must admit the truth behind it. We have set this timeline with our actions. Those unintentional actions which are bringing about desolation. There is no doubt the time is coming.

The last part of the message Daniel received and the last words he relays to us are a quote from the messenger, "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your inheritance." Many believe that when we die, we are instantly transported to heaven. People have come up with so many visuals of what heaven looks like in their mind's eye. No where in the Bible, have we learned that this is the case. In fact, this last passage very clearly states that we will rest, later to rise. Christian church, why are the people being misled and confused? In all references of what happens to us from the Bible, the message is that we will rest and be called back to life at the time of judgement. The question is will we rest in peace, in fear, or in wickedness? Do we fear the Lord? Do we dread our time of judgement? When all things are revealed to us, will we be able to say we made amends for all our wrongs? Will we repent of our sins? Will we *understand*?

The total number of people that God moved to return to the land was around fifty thousand. The people who returned donated their funds to the rebuilding effort. Once the people were settled into their towns, they began by rebuilding the altar of God to sacrifice burnt offerings on it following the laws Moses had written for them. Despite their fear of those around them, they began performing the appointed sacrifices, appointed feasts, and offerings to the Lord. They then began trading with Sidon and Tyre to get logs to use in the rebuilding of the temple. About two years after their return, they began building the temple. When their enemies heard they were rebuilding the temple they first offered assistance. However, knowing this offer was not legitimate, the people refused the help. This caused their enemies to try discouraging them from building. They hired counselors to frustrate the effort, and this continued for quite some time.

The Bible moves forward in the timeline some now and we are at the time when Xerxes was the reigning king of all the land. This is during a time when Persia and Greece were fighting against each other. But the Persian empire ruled over the land of

Judah wherein the people were trying to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and more importantly to those around them, they were going to be rebuilding the wall around it. With Xerxes as the king, we find the story of Esther. Esther was a descendant of those who were taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, and she had been living in the citadel of Suza. When King Xerxes got angry with his wife, the queen, for not showing up when he called for her, he sent her away. This meant he needed to get a new queen. The process of this was something quite foreign to our current traditions. The girls were gathered from the local area and spent a full year in preparation to present themselves to the king. Whichever girl the king called for to see again would be the one he chose as his queen. Esther was that girl. She diligently went through the entire process and was chosen to be his queen. Mordecai was Esther's father figure as she was growing up. He took care of her after her parents passed away. He would sit outside the king's gate every day and as he did one day, he heard two of the king's officers plotting to kill the king. He informed Esther of the plot, who in turn reported it to the king making sure he knew it was Mordecai who provided the information.

Meanwhile Xerxes had honored a man named Haman and placed him above the nobles. Everyone would kneel and honor Haman except for Mordecai. Remember the Israelites were now called Jews. Haman knew Mordecai was a Jew and was furious at him for not kneeling to show Haman honor. But rather than just taking his anger out on Mordecai, Haman devised a plan to kill all of the Jews. Haman went to king Xerxes and informed him that there were Jewish people spread all through the land who did not follow all of the king's laws and decrees and stating that the king should have them all killed. So, Xerxes issued a decree to all the land that on a certain day they were to kill every Jewish person among them. Mordecai heard the decree along with the rest of the people and they collectively mourned. Word of Mordecai's distress reached Esther and upon hearing about it, she sent out a servant to find out from Mordecai what was going on. Mordecai relayed everything to her through the servant. After a few correspondences back and forth, Esther decides to go to the king to get him to relent from this. She herself was Jewish, but that had not been revealed to the king yet.

She approached the king in formal fashion to lodge a request. He allowed her to come before him and make her request. She tells him that she would like him and Hamon to come to a banquet she has prepared and then she will tell him her request. They have the banquet, and the king asks her what her request is, to which she replies

that she would like the king and Hamon to come to another banquet the next day and she will lodge her request then. Haman went home and passed Mordecai, once again refueling his anger when Mordecai did not kneel to honor him. Out of his anger and following the advice of his wife and friends, he has gallows built seventy-five feet high with the intention of hanging Mordecai from it. That same night, Xerxes couldn't sleep and was listening to someone read the record of his reign. He heard the story of Mordecai and how he had reported and stopped the assassination attempt on the king's life. Xerxes asks what has been done to honor Mordecai for this. And he is told nothing has been done. At that time, Haman had just returned to the king's court so Xerxes called him in and asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman, not knowing this was related to Mordecai but instead thinking it must be about Haman himself replies by telling Xerxes to robe the man in the king's royal robe, put him on one of the king's horses and have him led through the streets proclaiming, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" Xerxes likes this idea, so he orders Haman to do just that with Mordecai. So, Haman was forced to lead Mordecai all through the streets proclaiming that statement all the way. Haman goes home for a brief time and is then brought back to the king's court for the banquet with Esther as requested.

This time Esther finally gives her request to the king. That request is for him to spare her people. The king asks who is responsible for threatening the lives of her people and she informs him that Haman was behind it. The king took a moment to discern what to do and as he did, Haman fell onto the couch where Esther was sitting. Appearing as he was trying to molest her, the king has Haman taken to the seventy-five-foot-tall gallows Haman had built for Mordecai and has him hanged there. Esther pleaded with Xerxes to stop the decree to kill all of the Jews. Not only did the king stop that decree but he allowed Mordecai to issue a new decree in the king's name. The new decree allowed the Jews a day to attack and destroy all of those who threatened them. On that day the Jews assembled in all the provinces of king Xerxes and struck down their enemies. They killed five hundred men in the citadel of Suza and the ten sons of Haman. The next day at Esther's request to the king, he allowed them to do this again and that day, three hundred more were killed in the citadel of Suza. Elsewhere throughout the kingdom, seventy-five thousand were killed. From that time on, the Jewish people of the land held those days as celebrations. There is an important quote to aid our understanding here, "the Jews took it upon themselves to establish the

custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed."

We are learning of the continued division of the people. In Ezra we are learning that a large group of the people returned to start the rebuilding, meanwhile in Esther we are learning that the people are not consulting with God and are taking matters into their own hands. Yes, it was good that the people were spared from the decree to have them killed, but of their own doing Esther and Mordecai had many thousands killed and then took it upon themselves to have a celebration set up in honor of these events. We must understand time and circumstance. We must understand what comes from God and what comes from man. In fact, God is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther. It's not hard to see that they were seeking their own desires. We may say they were justified in their actions. But remember how Moses was reprimanded by God for stating to the people that he and Aaron would bring the water from the rock rather than giving God the glory He deserved for it. Our daily struggles may sway our discernment. Keeping our path in alignment with God's plan can be difficult. What that plan is, we still need to understand.

As we read in Ezra, the people had started rebuilding the temple of the Lord. However, Ezra tells us that during the reign of King Artaxerxes, the leaders of the Persian people in the area informed Artaxerxes that the Jews were rebuilding the temple, and they reminded the king of the history the people had. That history was the view of it from the outside, that these people were rebellious and wicked and that was why they had been destroyed in the first place. Artaxerxes pulled the historical files and found this to be true, so he declared that they must stop the rebuilding of the temple. The Persian leaders in the area forced the Jews to stop the building efforts by physical force.

This is where we learn about Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been away from Judah and was told of the state of things as the people returned to their land in its state of destruction. He was devastated to hear of the state of things. Nehemiah had become a fairly prominent member of the Persian society. He was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. One day the king noticed Nehemiah was distraught and questioned what was wrong. Nehemiah explained how the land he was from was in ruins and he wished to return to it to help in the rebuilding. Artaxerxes, finding favor in Nehemiah, sent him

to do the work of rebuilding the city. We can see here that Artaxerxes did not have a solid grip on all of the movements under his reign. He had signed off on stopping the rebuilding of the temple but had signed onto the rebuilding of the city. There is later evidence as well supporting the lack of organization in the top leadership as Artaxerxes' search for the history of the people did not find King Cyrus's decree to rebuild the city. It turns out these historical texts were kept in a different location to be found later by King Darius.

So, Nehemiah returned to Judah where he stayed incognito for the beginning of his time there in order to go around inspecting the wall and the city. After finding it all in ruins, Nehemiah gathers the leaders of the people, and they begin divvying up the work to rebuild the walls. Each family was given a section of the wall to restore. They continued to receive opposition to the rebuilding to the point of placing guard duty on those doing the work to the wall. During this time, Nehemiah receives complaints from the Israelite people regarding the taxes being placed on them. They were having to borrow money to pay the king's taxes to the point of mortgaging their property to pay. Nehemiah calls out the leaders regarding this, telling them "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" The leaders agreed with Nehemiah and relented of the taxes they were placing on the people.

Nehemiah also gives us important insight into what people should expect from a leader. Neither Nehemiah or those leading with him, took any funds from the people nor did they take any of the food and grain offerings the people presented. Instead, their efforts were devoted to their work of rebuilding. Those in leadership roles should not take anything from those they are leading. Understand. Nehemiah's work on the rebuilding continued until its completion.

During this time of rebuilding is when we hear from another of God's prophets, Haggai. Haggai understood the reasoning for the grumbles of the people. They complained because their crops failed, their money wouldn't last, and they felt defeated. Haggai spoke the word of God to the people stating: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" To which God states through Haggai, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" The point was that the people were putting themselves first and God

second. God tells them through Haggai to gather the timber needed and resume rebuilding the temple.

Once the people heard Haggai's message, they decided to reach out to the now king Darius. They wrote him a letter explaining how King Cyrus had issued a decree years prior which stated to have it rebuilt. Darius was able to find this record, as mentioned, not where it would have been expected to be. Therefore, he gave approval for the rebuilding of the temple to resume. And so, it did.

Upon completion of the temple Haggai speaks to the people again at God's command. He asks them who among them remembers the glory of the previous temple, and wonders if they look at the new temple and see it as nothing. This message makes sense. It is something to see a new version of a temple which was once held so dear to them. Those who hold on to tradition can be lost when change occurs. But this message isn't stating the new temple is nothing, the message is stating that a new version can be something incredible when implemented into God's plan. God goes on to tell them through Haggai, "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the Earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory. The silver is mine and the gold is mine. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, and in this place I will grant peace." It is evident this has not happened yet at the time of this writing.

God further defines this for us as He later gives Haggai an example. He asks if a priest carries some consecrated bread, that is bread that has been set aside for worship or made holy, and it brushed against something else does it make that other thing holy? Of course, this answer is no, but if they are carrying something unclean and it brushes against something else does it make that other thing unclean? The answer here is yes. This is to show that wickedness spreads easily whereas righteousness does not. God says, "So it is with this people and this nation in my sight. Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled. Now give careful thought to this from this day on- consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple." He goes on to explain this is referring to how the people's crops failed from blight, mildew, and hail. He goes on to say, "Give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid." This was defined as a day later in the ninth

month so we can imagine this at a time of little growth when speaking of natural life as this is closing in on winter. “Give careful thought: Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. From this day on I will bless you.” We must understand this simple brief message. Planting a field in the fall season will not yield crops. But planting in the spring season will yield a mighty crop. The foundation was laid at a time when growth could not occur. God is speaking to the *understanding* we must reach. We must devote our temple to the Lord at a time when we can yield a mighty crop from it. Understanding time is not the same to God as it is to us, we know that the seasons are nothing in the heavens. Therefore, this does not refer to the temple being built at a certain time of the physical calendar year but instead at a time when our hearts are ready to yield the crop. It must come at a time of *understanding*. That time is now.

Lastly Haggai relays one more message to us which relates to our present time, using reference from the time of the rebuilding. “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the Earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horse and rider will fall, each by the sword of his brother. On that day, I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord almighty.” It is important to understand Zerubbabel was the main leader of the Jewish people who had returned to Judah. He was the lead in all of the rebuilding efforts. So, we must understand in the time when God shakes the heavens and the Earth, Zerubbabel or the one to rebuild God’s kingdom would be given the authority to do so. This promise should not be lost from the previous statement regarding our understanding of the building of the temple. It must come at a time when we are ready to yield the crop otherwise God’s signet remains hidden from us.

Zechariah is another prophet during the time of rebuilding. He tells us of an image he received from God of a man on a red horse standing among some myrtle trees. Behind him were red, white, and brown horses. The angel speaking with Zechariah explains to him that the horses represent those who God has sent to go throughout the Earth. Red is the color of wickedness, white is the color of purity, and brown is the color used to represent the Earth. It makes sense that these horses represent wickedness, purity, and the Earth itself. When asked, the horses report that the world is at peace. The angel who was speaking to Zechariah asks God how long He will be angry

with Judah and Israel. God goes on to explain that although He is jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, He is angry with the nations that feel secure. It seems when the horses reported that the world was at peace, God disagreed with them. He states "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem. My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem." This brings witness to the message we received from Haggai, again at a time when people are ready to yield the crop.

Zechariah tells of another vision of four horns and four craftsmen, easily explained as the horns representing the nations which scattered the people and the craftsmen representing those coming to terrify and throw down the horns. This continues into another vision regarding a man with a measuring line sent to measure Jerusalem. But an angel tells him to stop because it will be a city with no walls protected by God. God states "Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north, for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven." As we discovered, the land of the north represents the unintentional consequences of our actions. "Come O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon! After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you- for whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye- I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the Lord almighty has sent me. Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you, many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord almighty has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling." The time for that statement had not yet come. Understand it now!

Joshua was the high priest under Zerubbabel when the people returned from their exile. Zechariah's next message refers to this Joshua. Zechariah tells us how he had a vision of Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing next to Joshua to accuse him. Zechariah tells us God rebuked Satan saying, "Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" We must understand this statement before going into the rest of this vision. What is a burning stick snatched from the fire? Imagine pulling a stick from the fire. It is still burning; the flame has been ignited on it.

But it will not burn up because it was saved from the fire. Remember the burning bush Moses saw and the way it represented that despite the oppression the people were under (the flame) they did not burn up (the bush) because God protected them. In this same way, Satan (the flame) was prepared to accuse Joshua (the bush) but God snatched Joshua from the fire. He forgave Joshua for all his sins, rebuking Satan and sparing Joshua. We still need to understand what Satan is and this gives us insight. The rest of the vision helps our *understanding*.

Zechariah goes on to explain how Joshua was wearing dirty clothing and after God rebukes Satan, Joshua is stripped of his dirty clothes and told "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then a clean turban was placed on Joshua, and he was clothed. This passage helps us begin to understand that Satan is, in part, the creeping doubt, the feeling we have that we sinned too much in our lives. The dirty feeling we have from the experiences in our lives. But if we are true to God, if we put our effort into walking in His ways then He will save us from our sin. That Satan which taunts us can be so easily dismissed by God as long as we are seen to be true in our conviction. We have heard said that all men are wicked from birth. Shouldn't we consider that Satan is with us when we are born. Should we consider the physical nature of our very existence, which causes us desire, to be Satan? Consider the serpent who enticed Adam and Eve. Satan is not the serpent, but that which causes us to desire things of the flesh, and that which tortures us for it. Christian church, what do you understand Satan to be? Doesn't he live in you as well? Do you believe God will so easily dismiss Satan from you if you do not change your ways?

The next part of the message refers to Jesus and more. The angel of the Lord said to Joshua, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here. Listen O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it, and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree."

What are the things to come these men symbolized? We know God's servant, the Branch, refers to Jesus. We know the seven eyes on the stone in front of Him represent the church. We have no insight into the inscription. We certainly know the removal of the sin of the land has not yet occurred. We do not invite each other to sit under our vines or fig trees. It can be surmised that things to come are upon us now. Joshua's associates would have been those helping to rebuild the land and refresh the truth of God. The time has come for this. We must rebuild God among us. We must be those symbolized in this message. The sin must be removed from the land. We must make a way, prepare, understand.

The next vision Zechariah gives us is of a gold lampstand with a bowl at the top of it and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. There were also two olive trees by it, one on the left, and one on the right. The angel of the Lord explained to Zechariah in this way, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit. What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then He will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'" Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hands of Zerubbabel." It is easy to understand this as simply as Zerubbabel will complete the rebuilding of the temple. But this is something more. What mighty mountain is referred to here? We already know that the rebuilding of the temple in Zerubbabel's time did not level any mighty mountains, their oppressors remained. We should understand Zerubbabel as those willing to rebuild for God. The mighty mountain remains. The time has come for us to level it and rebuild God. Lay the capstone with shouts of God bless it! But don't stop there, we need to finish it! Clearly this is not a building of stone and steel. This temple is of the spirit. This temple has no walls. This temple is every one of us who wish to walk in all God's ways following His commands. However, we still don't know God's plan. We must understand it before we act.

The Lord explains to Zechariah that the seven lights with seven channels represent the eyes of the Lord which range throughout the Earth. Regarding the olive trees, these are described as being the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the Earth. Immediately after this Zechariah tells us he saw a flying scroll thirty feet long and

fifteen feet wide. At this, the angel of the Lord says, “This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The Lord Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.’” This scroll is the truth of the Word. When it is understood, it enters the house of the wicked and destroys it. Either the wicked will understand God has trapped it here, or it will change and be no longer wicked. The temple is rebuilt in us, the church has spread the Old and New Testaments over the whole Earth, now let the curse be on the wicked. Understand.

Zechariah then tells us the angel of the Lord asked him to look up to see a basket. The angel explains that the basket is the iniquity of the people throughout the land. The basket had a cover of lead which was lifted off to reveal a woman in the basket. Upon seeing her the angel states “This is wickedness.” And he pushed her into the basket and pushed the lead cover back over her. Then Zechariah saw two women above him with the wind in their wings. He explains they had the wings of a stork, and they lifted the basket and carried it away. It is important to understand that lead symbolizes the burden of sin and the need for purification. Wickedness was covered with the burden of sin and the need for purification. The women with the wings of a stork were to represent maternal instincts of purity and devotion under the protection of God’s swiftness. Zechariah asked the angel where they were taking the basket. To which the angel replied, “To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place.” In Hebrew the text reads Shinar rather than Babylonia, but there can be confusion here. Shinar was the name used for the land which contained Babylon; however, this is a symbolic reference. Babylonia is an ok translation. We are starting to understand how Babylon is now representative of wicked society. This vision gives evidence that wickedness was put in place within Babylon. Now do we understand the statements pleading for us to come out of Babylon?

Zechariah tells us he looked up again and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains of bronze. The first had a red horse, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled. He also states that all of them were powerful. First of all, chariots represented either angels or military power. It seems in this case both are

appropriate. A mountain is symbolic of political or religious power. Bronze was symbolic of God's desire to dwell with His people. So, these angels of power came out from two groups of political or religious factions which God intends to dwell with. These four chariots are often referred to as the same four horsemen of the apocalypse which we later read about in the book of Revelation. The black horsed chariot symbolizes the power of moral darkness. Zechariah tells us it went to the north. Remember Ezekiel's temple, those unintended consequences, the power of moral darkness, the abomination which causes desolation. The white horsed chariot symbolizes pure strength armed against evil and we are told it went to the west. This would be our gallery, those events which are now behind us. But we must understand this chariot does not purify our past, however, it tells us we must create a pure history. The dappled horsed chariot is representative of death, and we are told it went to the south. Our intended actions which lead to death. Be honest with ourselves, there are many. The red horsed chariot symbolizes sin. It is important to understand we are not given the direction this horse went. We can assume it went east since all other directions were taken. East is our path forward. Aren't we walking a path of sin? Doesn't this make sense? In Ezekiel's temple we are told that Jesus enters from the east and once in, He holds His place there. Stop sin and allow Jesus to enter, purifying our future gallery. We will get to this. For now, we still need to understand God's plan. Zechariah tells us the horses struggled at first but at God's command they went throughout the Earth. Then God calls to Zechariah saying, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north." How can God say His Spirit was given rest knowing the power of moral darkness is there? Know this, if the power of moral darkness is there, then God's Spirit is at rest there. God warned the people repeatedly that if they did not walk in His ways and follow His decrees, He would forsake them. His Spirit will remain at rest in the land of the north unless we awaken it! Understand.

Zechariah is then told to take some silver and gold from several who just arrived from exile. He is told to take it to Joshua the high priest and make a crown from it to place on his head. God tells Zechariah to say to Joshua, "Here is the man whose name is the branch, and He will branch out from His place and build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And He will be a priest on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two." He goes on to say the crown will be given to Heldai, whose name means robust, Tobijah, whose name means God's goodness, Jedaiah whose name means God knows, and Hen translated

as the gracious one and listed as son of Zephaniah who we have not heard from yet. He says it will be given to them as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. And further states "Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God." We should understand that Joshua is the branch, branching out to spread God's message through God's robust goodness and knowledge unto the gracious one which we can assume was reference to Jesus. Interestingly Joshua and Jesus are the same name in different languages. It is time for those who are far away to rebuild the temple! Obey God and see that this happens, then we will know.

Now we should consider that Zechariah did not separate these visions in his writing. We heard of the man among the myrtle trees which showed how God was upset with all nations for feeling that they were secure and at peace. Then the four horns which scatter God's people and the four craftsmen who scare the horns. Then the man with the measuring line where we find that there will be no wall, and we hear God's pleading for us to come out of Babylon. Next Joshua is forgiven and cleansed. Then Zerubbabel, we are told, will rebuild the temple with the two anointed to serve the Earth at His side. Then the flying scroll calling a curse over the whole Earth specifically stated- against the thief and those who swear falsely. Then the basket of wickedness is set in its place followed by the four chariots sent over the Earth. Lastly Joshua's crown and the harmony between the two. This is insightful into our written history as we can relate this account to the story we have heard so far. Although this helps our understanding and gives us a plan for how we should proceed, it still doesn't answer what God's purpose is for us. Perhaps it is the harmony between the two we need to understand. What two are referred to? It is simply us and God.

During this time of King Darius while the people were given permission to continue rebuilding the temple, the people had been fasting regularly in memory of the siege and overthrow of Jerusalem. The people asked Zechariah if they needed to continue this fasting now that the temple was being rebuilt. Zechariah says the word of the Lord came to him saying, "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? Are these not the words the Lord proclaimed through

the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'" God goes on to tell them to show mercy to each other and to care for those in need. And He goes on to say, "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets. So, the Lord Almighty was very angry. 'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen. I scattered them with a whirlwind among the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the land desolate.'" Isn't that accurate enough?

Zechariah's message moves on to tell us how God promises to return the people to Jerusalem one day. God says, "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" Should it seem marvelous to God? Will we be sincere in this coming return? Didn't God expect it, plan for it? Can we make it marvelous to Him yet? He says, "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God." We should note here that God does not say He will save His people from the north and the south, from our intended actions leading to death, and our unintentional consequences leading to the power of moral darkness. He instead states He will save His people from the east and the west. The gallery and the direction we face. We must have a pure gallery, and our path must be directed to walking in God's ways allowing Jesus to enter from the east. Understand.

As has been with other prophets we have read about, Zechariah also gives an oracle regarding the enemies of Israel. This is followed by a foreshadowing of Jesus as God tells the people to rejoice because their king is coming to them gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He says this king which we know to be Jesus will proclaim peace to the nations and His rule will extend over the whole Earth. He tells how the Lord will appear over the people and will save them. He tells how the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd. God tells how His anger burns against the shepherds, and that He will punish the leaders. He states again that the house of Judah will be restored, and the house of Joseph will be saved. He tells

how He will call all people to return and that the rest of the nations will fall. Even giving us proof by saying the waters of the Nile River will dry up leaving Egypt desolate. Hasn't that happened?

God then says to pasture the flock marked for slaughter. This means instead of taking them to slaughter, release them back to graze in the pasture. He explains what He means by pointing out that the shepherds rejoice with how rich they are from taking so many lambs to the slaughter, obviously disregarding the lives of the lambs and putting their hearts on the money they will make. God says, "I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king." That sounds right in our time. "They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands." Their- in this case refers to the shepherds, the leaders. So, God says He pastured the flock marked for slaughter particularly the oppressed of the flock. He then says He took two staffs, calling one favor and the other union, and in one month He got rid of the three shepherds. These would be the Pharisees the Sadducees and the Herodians. These would be the opposing factions during the time of Jesus. He says after this the flock detested Him and He said "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh." Then God says He broke His staff called favor revoking the covenant He had made with all nations. God tells them if they think it best, to give Him His pay, so they paid Him thirty pieces of silver. God says to throw it in to the potter as that is what they valued His life to be worth. Then He broke His staff called union breaking the brotherhood between Israel and Judah. God then says He will raise a shepherd who will not care for the flock but will instead eat the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. God says, "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!" This last shepherd is the one which leads us now. God placed it over us. Understand, we deserved it and do still to this very day. Repent of our ways!

Zechariah gives another oracle concerning the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem. God tells how there will be a day when all nations are against Judah and Jerusalem and in that time, He will make Jerusalem an immovable rock. He also says He will make Judah a flame which consumes all the surrounding people but leaves Jerusalem intact. In doing this, the Lord will save Judah first so that Jerusalem's inhabitants will not be greater than Judah. Zechariah tells us, "On that day the Lord will shield those

who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son." From this we can understand that in that time, we will see that which caused the people to crucify Jesus and will know the error of our ways.

God also says in that time; He will open a fountain to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. He also says He will remove the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. He states that prophets in that time will be denounced and even stabbed by their own parents. Therefore, the prophets will be ashamed of their prophetic vision and hide themselves. He goes on to say how God calls forth a sword to strike down the shepherd so the sheep would be scattered and God's hand turned against the little ones. God says, "In the whole land, two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people', and they will say 'The Lord is our God.'"

Zechariah tells us of a day of the Lord which is yet to come when all nations will gather against Jerusalem. He says that half of the city will be taken into exile and half will remain. He says at that time the Lord will stand on the mount of olives breaking it in two. It will open a pathway for the people to flee through. He says on that day once the remaining people have fled, there will be a day with no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day without daytime or nighttime- a day known only to the Lord, when evening comes there will be light. "On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be king over the whole Earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name." From then on, Jerusalem will be secure. But understand this Jerusalem to be the nation of those who walk in God's ways.

As for the plague which will strike the rest of the nations he says, "Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and

their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other. Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all surrounding nations will be collected- great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps." This is followed by a statement that all survivors from the surrounding nations will from then on go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and that if they don't, they will have no rain. He says, "On that day *HOLY TO THE LORD* will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty." Note Canaanite as used here refers to merchants. It seems in that time all remnants of us will understand, repent, and begin to see all things as holy. Perhaps it is only then that we understand.

At this point in the story, we know that Darius allowed the people to continue re-building. So, the people did continue building under the preaching of Haggai and the prophet Zechariah. They finished building the temple according to the command of God, and the decrees of Cyrus, Artaxerxes, and Darius. The people then celebrated and dedicated the temple with offerings. They reinstated the priests and the Levites and celebrated the Passover. The rebuilding of the wall also finished around this same time. After everything was rebuilt and the Israelites were settled in their homes, all the people assembled, and they had Ezra bring out the book of law of Moses. Ezra read the book of law to them and the Levites assisted in helping the people to *understand* it. The people mourned greatly as they heard and *understood* the reading. But Nehemiah reassured them saying, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah tells us in his writing, "Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now *understood* the words that had been made known to them." Understand.

A few days later, the people hear Nehemiah praying to God for forgiveness. The people feel the same and they all commit to adhering to the Book of the Law of Moses.

The people also dedicated the completion of the wall with choirs and procession. Even when faith seems lost, God rebuilds from the remnants, both city and spirit.

Remembering Nehemiah was given permission to go back to his homeland from Artaxerxes, the time came for Nehemiah to return to Persia. He did for a short time and when he later returned to Jerusalem, he found that the storerooms in the temple had been loaned out to others and the portions assigned for the Levites and singers were not provided for them. He put an end to this. He also found that the markets were in full swing on the sabbath days. He put an end to this as well. He discovered the people were marrying women from other nations. Remembering Solomon and how he was led to sin in this way, Nehemiah also put an end to this. His last remark in his writing is, "Remember me with favor, O my God."

Nehemiah is telling us that he already saw the people falling away from God again. Malachi is the last prophet we hear from, and he provides stark warnings along this very vein. Malachi comes along after the completion of the rebuilding of both the temple and the wall. The people had returned to the land and were settling in. Malachi offered stark warnings to the people. But did they listen to the word of God which came from Malachi?

Malachi begins his writing with an oracle to the people of Israel. In the words of the Lord, "I have loved you, but you ask, 'How have you loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." Malachi says, "Edom may say 'Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.'" But he tells us the Lord says, "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the Lord- even beyond the borders of Israel!'" We know the story of Esau and Jacob. We know Jacob became the family line of Israel and Esau the family line of Edom. God's message is clear, we have always separated between two groups, those who follow God and those who do not. God loves those who follow Him, His message to us simply states that we have been like Edom, God asks us to be like Jacob.

God directs His next message through Malachi toward the priests. Christian church, pay attention! "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a

Father, where is the honor due me? It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will He accept you? Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you and I will accept no offering from your hands. My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations. But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you will say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously. When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands? Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king, and my name is to be feared among the nations. And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and you do not set your hearts to honor my name, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me. Because of you I will rebuke your descendants, I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. And you will know that I have sent you this admonition, so that my covenant with Levi may continue. My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction- because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi. So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of law." Christian church, you must understand! As for the rest, we must all understand! We must all become priests, giving true and pure sacrifices of ourselves and along the lines of the Levites, we must all instruct each other in the ways of the Lord. But in

order to do this we must understand. Instruction without *understanding* is nothing more than a command given to one who is thereby oppressed.

Malachi continues his message directed at the priests. As we have already read, they were back to their old ways of marrying women who served other gods. Keeping in mind that the priests were intended to instruct the people in God's ways, it does beg the question how that teaching could be pure, knowing there existed influence from their wives who followed other gods. Malachi says, "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" He explains Judah has broken faith and desecrated the sanctuary by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. He also says, "Another thing you do; you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant." Understand if their wives were worshipping other gods, their faith could not align with the faith of the priests. That in and of itself was the violation of God's witness to their marriage covenant. How can two become one if they don't share the same faith? Doesn't that cause separation? Malachi says, "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking Godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." Note the hint we receive here to God's plan, which is that He seeks Godly offspring. God says, "I hate divorce, and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment." Malachi tells us "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith." Clearly what Malachi is saying here, is that the priests needed to remain with their wives and teach their wives the truth of the Lord.

Malachi then tells the people, "You have wearied the Lord with your words. 'How have we wearied Him?' you ask. By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and He is pleased with them.' or 'Where is the God of justice?'" Christian church, are you not spreading the message that all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord? Don't you use Jesus's forgiveness as a platform for this very misleading message. Where is your integrity? Why are you not teaching the true message?

God says, “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple, the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.” Malachi then says, “But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.” God adds to this, “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me.”

Remembering God does not change, He remains God with the same purpose, yet He also does not fear correction to His plan, He sends us this message through Malachi, “I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you. But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.” Seems in order to return we must no longer rob God. “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse- the whole nation of you- because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit. Then the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land.” It is true we concern ourselves so much over where we will get our next meal, that we do not give back to God that which is His. If we were only willing to give up the choicest of what we have, filling the storehouse of the Lord, then He would provide for us. Our faith would be tested greatly in this and God’s reward for that faith is promised to be a true blessing. Would any of us be willing to put it all in the storehouse, trusting in the Lord to provide for us?

God continues, “You have said harsh things against me, yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’ You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out His requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and

even those who challenge God escape.'" Malachi then tells us, "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored His name." To which the lord says, "They will be mine, in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between those who serve God and those who do not." Don't we still call the arrogant blessed today? Don't we falsely state we have carried out the Lord's requirements and gained nothing, never admitting we have not once in our history wholeheartedly carried out His requirements? Those who fear the Lord need to come together and talk to each other! Understand! Entreat the Lord to listen and to hear us. Let the distinction between those who serve God and those who don't be clear. We also must understand another hint to God's purpose found in this message, which is that God will someday, out of us, make up His treasured possession!

Then God says through Malachi, "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will fall and be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." Those are the last words Malachi gives us. We later read that Jesus states John the Baptist was the Elijah God referenced here. Have our hearts turned or are we living under the promised curse? Understand.

All history pointed toward the return of *understanding* in human form. From that time forward, Israel waited for the promised Messiah.

The need for a teacher

To recap, we have now learned God created all things for a purpose we do not yet realize. We know that we were put on this Earth as part of the habitat. We have learned that the knowledge of good and evil is a test for us. We have learned that every intention of our hearts is wicked from birth. We have learned that it is possible for individuals to break away from that wicked tendency like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did. We have learned that the people who break away from that wicked tendency live separate from those who don't. We have learned that God is able to bring down punishment on mankind in whatever form He pleases, yet we also learned He does not do this without justification. We learned that all things happen to suit God's purpose, even those things which do not appear to be founded in the goodness and love we would expect, inevitably serve God's purpose. We also learned that God's chosen people were predestined for certain milestones.

God's chosen people were then divided. We have learned of the division of God's chosen people since the story of Cain and Abel. We have pointed out how groups of people defect from God's chosen people consistently throughout the written history. Yet, everything according to God's plan. At each breakout of people, God gives instruction that simply by returning to walking in all His ways, the people will be redeemed. In all history from that time until this modern day, we have not.

We know that God created all things. He created Adam and Eve in the garden and then created mankind on the Earth. We know that Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and were then cast out of the garden and sent to work the Earth with the rest of mankind. We know God's chosen people were joining together with mankind. We know the Lord grew tired of contending with mankind and was appalled at the wickedness which had infested His creation. We know that God does not fear correction and eliminated all life from the Earth, both His chosen people and the rest of mankind with the exception of only one family who God found worthy of saving. We know they were tasked with repopulating the Earth. We know during that course, at each generation, all fell from walking in God's ways except only one line. We know that single lineage ended up finding a home in Egypt and growing greatly in number without any of their lineage failing to serve God. We know the situation which caused them to be enslaved, and we know that God chose to save them. We also know, at that time, God determined that line of people needed a book

of law to follow and so provided it to them. We know that despite having the book of law, the people were not able to remain true to following God's commands. We know judges were raised to help guide the people in this effort but they too failed. We know the people demanded a king to help keep them in line, that too failed. Although prophets had been around, the true prophets of God had been few and far between. Understanding that a prophet is one who speaks God's word, a messenger of God's true message, but God clearly saw the need for His prophets more than ever. His message was being both lost and ignored.

But in all this, we also started to see a transition into the next phase for God's people. They were clearly being broken and divided. They were allowing the outside influence of other nations to corrupt their actions. The time for protecting God's people from these nations ended and it was time to start preparing them for the next step in God's purpose. Remember everything according to His plan. Both the good and the bad we have explored so far have been working toward His purpose. We have seen God send the serpent to Adam and Eve and place the evil spirit of the Lord on Saul. We know God caused the Israelites to become slaves in Egypt, and we know He freed them from that oppression. Knowing and understanding that both the things we consider to be good and the things we consider to be bad are part of God's plan, we can know there is always hope. Although the Judeans and the Israelites were in dismay under the rule of these kings, as the prophets would tell us, it was only going to get worse. But the hope was starting to show itself in the form of the prophets whose mission was to share God's word with the people. It was the transitional phase from protecting the Israelites from outside influence to the Israelites themselves becoming the outside influence. These prophets were sent to warn the people of what was coming and to serve as an example of how the people should spread the word of God to all the surrounding lands with the hope of one day returning to the promised land. But we also read how the people didn't understand this promise. They assumed they were entitled to the land upon their initial return. As we read in Esther, God's name was not even on their lips. God recognized the people lacked *understanding* and therefore He would send His Son, the human manifestation of His very being, to teach us. If we wouldn't listen to the prophets, perhaps we would listen to God Himself in human form. We must understand. Chrisitan church, where in your teaching, the teaching supposedly derived from this teacher Himself, where do you speak of the reason Jesus was sent in the first place? It wasn't a welcome arrival. Yes, it was the arrival of the

Lord, the kingdom of God could have started on the Earth at that time, but we refused to accept it. Therefore, it became a way to teach us the errors of our ways. Despite our rebellious wickedness, God was still willing to help us. Do you teach this truth now or do you continue to say Jesus will forgive the sin of today when tomorrow comes? When will we accept that we can bring about the kingdom here on Earth by simply accepting Jesus and correcting our ways today? Straighten the path of your message! Return it to its original purpose! Understand!

After the rebuilding efforts in Jerusalem, the land has been under turmoil up until today's time. But in the immediate time following the rebuilding, the people faced struggles from the Greeks and the Romans. There is a gap in the story of the Bible at this time. God had told the people He would leave them to themselves, no longer accepting their offerings and no longer sharing His Word with them. The prophets were silenced. We reach a time when the Roman empire had control of Jerusalem. Julius Ceaser had a good relationship with Herod's father and as time passed Herod became governor of Galilee. Marc Antony was the one who ended up making Herod a tetrarch. Herod was later unexpectedly appointed king by the Roman senate. Although Herod claimed he was a Jew, he maintained the decadent lifestyle of the Herodians. Doesn't this sound familiar, he did not remove the outside influence. The Jewish people followed Herod as their king. He even had the temple expanded and the wall extended. But they still lacked *understanding*. It is during Herod's reign when we hear about the birth of the foretold Jesus.

There is much to be understood about the arrival of Jesus unto the Earth. Remember Judah's children Zerah and Perez and the breaking out of sin. Zerah representing sin, and Perez representing the breaking out. The words of the midwife gave us insight into how sin will truly break out into the world. Judah's desire for the prostitute represented our desire for sinful nature, whether in the line of God's chosen people or not. The family line of Perez led not only to Jesus but also to the Kings of Israel and Judah. Do we not see how sin breaks out under the guise of kings who claim to be God's chosen people yet are still held captive to mankind's sinful nature? Christian church, again, why is this story not captured in the teachings of the church? And in any case when it is, what message do you give? Do you relate this to the casting out of Satan from heaven? Do you understand the one sent to the Earth the same time as

Jesus and the breaking out of sin as it relates? Where is your *understanding*? Jesus will help us further this *understanding* later in His revelation.

Mathew gives us a genealogy of Jesus listing fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile, and fourteen from the exile to the birth of Jesus. Luke carries this lineage all the way back to Adam to show that we are all God's people, not just those along Jewish lines. Throughout the writings in the Bible, we know that genealogies held importance to the people of that time. There is an understanding we need to reach before proceeding. Despite what family line we claim, and despite the family line drawn from Abraham to Jesus, when we follow each of our family lines back to the beginning, we will find we all stem from the same family of God's people. Remember Noah and understand. God no longer cares what tribe or nation we stem from. Genealogies held purpose at that time, in our time and circumstance, genealogy is nothing more than an evolved form of pride. The fact of the matter is we all stem from the same genealogy whether we accept that fact or not.

Before we discover the story of the birth of Jesus, Luke gives us some more family history as it relates to Jesus' family. He tells us that during the time of Herod, there was a priest named Zechariah who was married to a woman named Elizabeth who was a descendant of Aaron therefore she was in the family line of the priests. Elizabeth was the sister of Mary who would be the mother of Jesus. We should note this Zechariah is different from the one we have previously read about. Keep in mind, just as in today's time, many people shared the same name. There were multiple Jesus', Johns, and Zechariahs as examples. Elizabeth was getting older and had no children in her old age. The time came that Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense there. He went in to do just that when an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel told Zechariah his wife would have a son, and they are to name him John. The angel added, "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." We are told Zechariah struggled to believe this as his wife was getting old. The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." The people waiting outside were becoming worried about Zechariah

since he was in the temple for so long. When he came out, he was unable to speak to them. The people realized he had a vision because he kept making signs to them but could not speak no matter how hard he tried. His wife Elizabeth did get pregnant.

Luke tells us that from there, Gabriel went to Nazareth where he informed Elizabeth's sister, Mary, that she was going to be pregnant as well and that she would name the baby Jesus. He said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end." Mary questioned this as she was a virgin, to which Gabriel tells her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary then went to visit Elizabeth and upon greeting her, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped. Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" Mary stayed with Elizabeth for several months. When Elizabeth had her baby, it was indeed a boy and although the people were saying they should name the boy after his father, Zechariah, Elizabeth said he will be named John. The people asked Zechariah what name the boy should have and he, still unable to speak, wrote "His name is John." Then he was able to speak again. People then knew that John was going to be special to the Lord.

The apostle John wrote for us regarding both Jesus and John the Baptist saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." The apostle John is explaining that Jesus is the "Word". We must understand what that means. It means the word of God. The undeniable truth. As we will discover, Jesus gave God's word to all people. He was with God from the start of all things and as John told us the Word was God. Therefore, Jesus would be God here with us in the flesh. He continues, "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that

life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not *understood* it." We must now understand! Then the apostle John goes on to tell us about John the Baptist saying, "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Later the apostle John tells us, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Back to the family line Mathew gave us, we come to Joseph who would be the earthly "father" of Jesus. Joseph was pledged to be married to Elizabeth's sister Mary, who as we have already discovered, before they were married or had any sexual relations, Mary became pregnant by the holy spirit. There are those who call this into question stating that she must have had intercourse with another, or been raped, or so drunken that she didn't remember the act. There is no evidence of the like, and this is all just causing our faith to stumble. It has also been said that "virgin" could be translated as young girl. Ask if it matters. Joseph was told the baby she conceived was from the Holy Spirit, accepting that as truth, it does not matter. Stop feeding doubt and find faith! Jesus would have one Father who is our Father in heaven. He later tells us that we too should have only one Father who is our Father in heaven. Jesus was not born of any man here from Earth. How could God Himself come from a man when man was created by God? To deny this is to deny Jesus. And to deny Jesus is to deny God. Understand! Joseph feared the worst, including both he and Mary being publicly humiliated. Therefore, he intended to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream one night and told him to take Mary as his wife because what she had conceived was from the Holy Spirit. The angel tells Joseph that she will give birth to a Son, and they will name Him Jesus. This fulfilled what Isaih told us, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel." Immanuel means God is with us. So, Joseph took Mary as his wife and did not have intercourse with her until after she had given birth to their Son who they did name Jesus. To this point in the story, our timeline has been in the era we used to refer to as BC which stands for "before Christ". We now live in the era we used to call AD which stands for "Anno Domini" which means "in the year of the Lord" and refers to the birth of Jesus. Since the time of this nomenclature, we have now changed BC to

BCE which means “before the common era” and AD is now CE meaning “common era”. We have removed God even from our concept of time which we know is a product of God’s creation. What are we doing? We must understand.

The story goes that when Jesus was born, a group of Magi, another name for wise men, went to the area looking for the baby. They ask around stating that they saw the star rise and when hearing of this, Herod asks them what exact day they saw the star. They tell Herod and he allows them to look for the boy expecting them to report back to him once they find the boy. The Magi continue searching until they see the star they were following stopped over the house where they find Jesus with His mother Mary and Joseph. When they do, the Magi give them gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh. But the Magi never returned to King Herod to file their report, they simply left and returned home. This enraged Herod and he issued a decree to have all the young men in Bethlehem killed who were born at that time. There is debate over this story as well due to lack of supporting evidence in other historical documents. However, we must understand a small town such as Bethlehem would only have a small number of children born at that time and hardly met the standards we see from that time regarding what should be worthy of documenting and what should not. This order to kill the boys born in Bethlehem fulfilled what Jeremiah told us, “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” That is the story of the birth of Jesus.

In our time we celebrate this event on the twenty fifth day of the month of December. We call it Christmas. There is nothing in the Bible telling us what exact day Jesus was born; therefore, our celebrated day is made up of our own intention conveniently near the end of our fiscal year, although that was not taken into consideration when the date was chosen. Furthermore, we shower each other with gifts on this day ignorantly claiming to be doing it for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Do we really believe after all we’ve learned and understood in our reading so far that this is how God wants us to celebrate such an occasion? On a false day, with gifts of jewelry, fancy dress, and choice foods? In addition, we have developed our own idols related to this day with our Santa Claus and reindeer, snowmen, and even our images of angels. We cut down trees to display in our homes and compete over the best décor. What are we celebrating? Christian church, where do you stand on this topic? Are you teaching the people the reason Jesus was sent? Are you explaining the need for a teacher? This is a

deserved shame we must all face head on. Correct your teaching! Understand. There should not be a single day to commemorate the physical birth of Jesus. We should celebrate the spiritual birth of Jesus every day! Not with our holiday idols, but in that- we accept the kingdom of God is with us and within us. If all did this, would this not be a merciful second coming for all to see?

Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord. There was a man named Simeon who they presented Jesus in front of. Simeon had been told he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. When he saw Jesus he said, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel." A light for revelation to the Gentiles, this is the most important understanding of Jesus for us. We have not to this point in our lives understood what Jesus truly was to us. When we get to the revelation of Jesus, we will better understand. Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Then, after a prophetess also proclaimed Jesus, Joseph and Mary took Jesus and returned to Galilee in Nazareth.

Before Herod's order to kill the children reaches them, Joseph once again is visited by the angel of the Lord in a dream. The angel tells him to take Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt to hide them there because Herod was going to have the boy killed. Joseph does as the angel told him and goes to Egypt. This fulfilled what Hosea told us, "Out of Egypt I called my Son." As they are hiding in Egypt, Herod becomes ill with a mysterious ailment. It was said to be a painful putrefying illness. That is, it was decaying or rotting him with a terrible smell. Being believed to be a combination of ailments, this has become known as "Herod's evil". He suffered this torture until he died. Upon his death, the angel of the Lord once again goes to Joseph and tells him it is now safe to return to the land since Herod was dead. Joseph moves back with Mary and Jesus, and hearing that Herod's son was now in charge, he feared returning to Judea and instead goes to live in Nazareth in the district of Galilee fulfilling what the prophets said, "He will be called a Nazarene."

The traditional Bible does not contain much of any history regarding the time of Jesus' youth. The apocryphal texts contain some stories of it; however, these were not included in the Bible due to the timing of their discovery coupled with their lack of supporting evidence. Ask yourself, "Does it matter?" Would anything Jesus did in His youth change our perception of what He did in His adulthood? Does ours? But Luke does tell us that each year Joseph and Mary would bring Jesus to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When Jesus was twelve and they took this trip, Joseph and Mary left to return home and didn't realize Jesus wasn't with them. We should note, people would go to and from these events in groups and it was likely normal for children of that age to be off with a different section of the group. When they started looking for Jesus, they realized He was not with the group and went back to Jerusalem to find Him. After about three days, they found Him sitting with a group of teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Luke tells us everyone who heard Jesus asking questions was amazed at His understanding of their answers. Mary began to question Jesus as to why He caused them so much anxiety while they looked for Him. Jesus replied, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Luke tells us they did not understand what Jesus meant.

Now, Elizabeth's son John had grown up as well. He was in the desert of Judea where he would baptize people with water for repentance. Isaiah spoke of John when he said, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'" Mark tells us John's clothes were made of camel hair, with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey and performed baptisms in the Jordan river. When he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." We must understand this message to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Pharisees cared more about the law than they did about walking in God's ways, they were made up mostly of those who had recently gained wealth enough that they could devote time to studying the law. We will learn the Pharisees openly oppose Jesus' teachings. The Sadducees were generationally wealthy and powerful and had control over the temple although they were not priests. They valued the law more than faith or grace. John tells them to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. This is an important statement if we understand it. Those Pharisees and Sadducees held their fortune and societal position above their faith. John knew it. Repentance- a change in behavior and attitude accompanied by remorse for past actions. Their fruit was not in keeping with repentance. They say they have Abraham as their father, but John tells them God can make children for Abraham out of the stones. They are basically trying to say that they don't need to put in the effort because Abraham was their father. This message is no different from us when we say, "We are all God's people, and Jesus forgave us, so we don't need to worry about repentance." Christian church, teach the truth. Understand John's message regarding Jesus, that He will clear the threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning the chaff. Will you be the gathered wheat or the burnt chaff?

When the people would ask John what they should do, he would tell them, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same. To the tax collectors he would say, "Don't collect any more than you are required to." To the soldiers he would say, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely- be content with your pay."

When Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, John argues that it should be Jesus who baptized John. Jesus replied, "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. When Jesus came up out of the water of the river, heaven was opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him and a voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

After Jesus was baptized by John, He was led by the Spirit into the desert where He fasted for forty days, another time of trial. At the end of the forty days as Jesus was hungry "the tempter" came to Him to tempt Him. We should know the tempter at this point as Satan, the serpent, that human desire. The tempter first tells Jesus, "If you

are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" His faith was so great that He understood we do need bread to live, but more importantly we need God's word in order that our lives be worth living. What good is filling ourselves with bread if we are leading wicked lives which lead to death? Remember the manna God provided the Israelites in the desert when they fled from Egypt. Is it better to die with an empty belly and a full *understanding* of righteousness, or to die with a full belly and an aversion to righteousness? Lord, give us our daily bread so that we might *understand*!

Next, the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had Him stand at the highest point of the temple saying, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus responded, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" In other words, there was no purpose in God's plan for Jesus to throw Himself off the temple just to show the devil that Jesus was the Son of God. It was mankind who needed to know this. Remember when God had the water come from the rock for the Israelites on their journey after fleeing Egypt, oh how they tested the Lord. Should we continue to test the Lord and extend our suffering as they did? Understand!

The third temptation Jesus would face was for Him to be brought to a very high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor to which Satan says, "All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus responded, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" Remember again the words of Moses to the Israelites following their exodus from Egypt warning them, "Fear the Lord your God, serve Him only and take your oaths in His name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and His anger will burn against you, and He will destroy you from the face of the land." God does not seek a ruler. He warned the Israelites what a king would do to them. The very same free will God has granted us negates the human concept of a ruler. Jesus understood this despite His right to the throne. He knew this comes from Satan, not God. Why do we still aim to achieve a position of leadership today? When we place God as our leader, following His law in unison, the concept of leadership is null. Understand!

At that, the devil left Jesus alone and the angels of the Lord came and tended to Jesus. Understand that overcoming wickedness and temptation is painful and uncomfortable for us, as it must have been for Jesus after fasting in the desert for forty days. But if we are able to overcome those temptations, we too will be tended to. Understand.

The conflict begins

The apostle John tells us that there was a time when Jesus and John the Baptist were both baptizing at the same time. Some of the disciples of John came to him and explained that more people were going to Jesus to be baptized then those coming to John. John explains to them that this is right saying, "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the Earth belongs to the Earth, and speaks as one from the Earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what He has seen and heard, but no one accepts His testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." What he is saying is that we can only speak regarding what we have heard, seen, or witnessed. John knew Jesus came from heaven so what Jesus had heard, seen, and witnessed were the things of the true God in heaven. Jesus is the only one of us who could ever make this claim! Understand, the rest of us will have a chance to be in heaven and witness these same things, but only if we accept the truth of the Word in totality.

Reports reached Jesus that John the Baptist had been thrown into prison. Upon hearing this, Jesus returned to Galilee where He began preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee He called to two men in a boat, Simon who was known as Peter, and his brother Andrew. Jesus said to them, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left the boat and followed Him. Jesus saw two other brothers, James, and John and called for them to follow Him as well. They left their father with their boat and followed Jesus. Luke tells us more of how this came to be, explaining that the men were out in their boats and Jesus was with Simon. They had fished all day with no catch when Jesus told them to once more put their net in the water. The net caught so many fish it started to break, and the other boats had to come to help bring the fish in. This is what convinced the men to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. The apostle John writes that Simon Peter and Andrew follow Jesus the day after John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the river. However, we should note that the apostle John made short his description of Jesus' birth and the start of Jesus' following. We should always remember who these writers were speaking to and what information mattered to the reader and what did not. Thankfully we have gospels written by four of Jesus' followers. This

helps us to see the full story. Little details stated one way by one disciple should not deter us from receiving the core message all four intended for us. The point is- there were those who saw and believed, and those who did not. The apostle John then tells us that Jesus told Philip to follow Him as He moved into Galilee. Philip in turn told Nathanael, and both followed Jesus from then on.

We are then told how Jesus was at a wedding with His family and His disciples. The wine ran out, and Jesus' mother told Him they were out of wine. Jesus replied to her, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." But His mother insisted and told the servants to do whatever Jesus asked of them. He simply told them to fill the twenty-to-thirty-gallon jars with water, then to scoop some out and bring it to the master of the banquet. The servants did and when the master tasted the water which had now turned to wine, he exclaimed at how that wine was better than the wine they had brought out at first. John tells us, "This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him." So, although Jesus told His mother He wasn't ready to start showing who He truly was, she determined it was time. Jesus knew everything according to God's will, and so He made Himself known. John reaffirms that this first miracle proved necessary as it solidified His disciple's faith in Him. Some have said, it was a meaningless miracle, wasn't water good enough? Did they need wine? Perhaps not, but they needed to solidify their faith in Jesus. We must understand His miracles were more than compassion. Each of Jesus' miracles show us that the Word, in the flesh-Jesus, restores what has been broken. The Word without the flesh means we must rely on the Word alone. Understand.

Mathew tells us about Jesus during this time saying, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria, and the people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and He healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him." We should understand the way of life for the people of that time. They had been plundered by several of history's largest empires. They had been removed from their land, exiled, and then allowed to return. Many years had passed and through the understanding of the Pharisees and

Sadducees we can see that the people were so focused on trying to follow the law written by Moses as accurately as possible while maintaining their stature among the Romans, they stopped finding the true purpose of those laws. The people were under oppression from these leaders and fighting and struggling to reach a common understanding. Here they found not only the foretold messiah, but a teacher who proved Himself with the miraculous healings He performed and with His insightful and authoritative speaking. Jesus never intended to abolish the law, He means to unveil its spirit- love, mercy, and truth.

There were those who recognized Jesus for what He truly was, the Son of God. But those who were believed to be the authority figures regarding the understanding of the law, would not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, surely, He was acting counter to the rule they had established over the people. The people were looking for salvation, they were living under the oppression of not only the Pharisees and Sadducees, but also of the Roman empire's tetrarchs who were placed in power over the area. Although the Herod who was in charge at the time of Jesus' birth had now died, his sons held the name Herod so as we read further into the text we will hear of Herod, but it is the son of the Herod who threatened to kill Jesus at the time of Jesus' birth. The people felt lost, and Jesus was the way to the answers they needed regarding how they should live. This is why they followed Jesus, and this is why He ended up being so contested.

Think back to the story of Job when we read how Satan was with God and the angels in heaven when God sent Satan to the Earth to test Job. When we read about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the desert, we do not read that Satan was with God at this time. We do not read that God sent Satan to test Jesus in the same way he was sent to test Job. We have read about Zerah and Perez and the breaking out of sin into the world. We have read about the Behemoth and the Leviathan, and we understood these to be the new way of life. Those beasts took full form with the Roman empire. The breaking out of sin came at the same time Jesus did. Jesus later clarifies this for us in His revelation.

But what we must understand is the reason for Jesus' arrival at that time in our history. The Roman empire was the increased inception of wickedness into the Behemoth and the Leviathan. Satan was cast out of heaven and forced onto the Earth at the

time of Jesus's arrival; right when the Roman empire was coming into great power. We know a lot about ancient Roman culture. In fact, it has influenced much of our modern-day culture with things such as infrastructure, government, culture, art, architecture, technology, literature, language, law, social practices and events, libraries, healthcare, news, and even schooling. Do we not understand these things to feed the Behemoth and the Leviathan? Do we not see that these things played into the breaking out of sin? In the story of Job, Satan tested him by taking from him. In the temptation of Jesus, Satan tested Him by offering to give Him anything He wanted in the entire world. This is quite the opposite of Job, but with the same intention. And this time, God had not sent Satan to do this, God cast Satan out and Satan did it on his own. He has continued to ever since, offering any one of us greatness on this Earth as a reward for forsaking God. Doesn't it make sense that God would come to us in human form, the Son of God, to teach us what was right in that time?

God warned us. He told us He would no longer respond to the pleading of the people. He told us His prophets would not be available to us. But He also told us about the coming of Jesus. He told us to heed this man. He told us there was hope in Jesus. As we will discover there were those in that time who believed and followed, and there were those who refused. Can we understand well enough in our time to believe and follow? Christian church, what will you say, will you now follow?

The teaching

And so, Jesus taught the people. Not only did He teach the people, but He would pull His disciples aside and provide them with the meaning of His teachings. Many of His teachings were told in parables. He had reason for this which we must understand. Jesus later explains to His disciples who, as we are about to discover, become apostles of His, that He speaks in parables to get us to *understand*. He reminds them how God made us blind and deaf to these things. He explains how He shares knowledge hidden from the beginning. It is one thing to tell someone; it is this way or that. But it is another to explain to someone a full *understanding* so they will be able to make proper discernment of their own. We will understand more as we continue.

On one occasion He sat with His disciples on a hillside and told a large crowd what we now refer to as beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Those are the beatitudes. It is clear Jesus is telling us how to focus ourselves to what is right. But that is not the end of this message, He continues, "You are the salt of the Earth." Let's understand this statement. We learned when we read about Lot and his wife after they left Sodom that Lot's wife turned to look back at what they left behind and in so doing, became a pillar of salt. We learned that salt is used as a preservative and that since she was trying to preserve that way of life, she became a pile of salt with no life. Jesus is not telling us we are lifeless salt; He is telling us that we are here to preserve the Earth! Understand. He continues, "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." He continues, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus has told us that the Law of Moses will remain in place until everything is accomplished. Do we think everything has already been accomplished? Do we have reason to believe the Law written for us by Moses is no longer valid? Even the people of that time were being led to believe that. But Jesus was telling them He was there to teach them the meaning behind the Law. He tried relentlessly to help the people understand that the Law was not intended to be so literal as to cause the values the Law was based on to be forsaken. We must understand His last statement here that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Sadducees), we will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Look at our laws today… yet do we hold true to the Law Moses gave us? Has our righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisees and Sadducees or are we just as they were? Christian church, where are you? Stop hiding in the shadow of these things!

Since the Pharisees and Sadducees had been revising the Law to appease both the people's complaints and the ruling empires, Jesus states to the crowd several times, "You have heard that it was said… but I tell you…" It is clear He was helping them to know the purpose of the Law and He does this regarding several topics. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca'," an Aramaic term of contempt, "is answerable to the Sanhedrin." The judicial body. "But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you

will not get out until you have paid the last penny." It is important to understand that Jesus is not saying the one who is angry should resolve the issue, but rather the one who caused the anger. His statement here began speaking about murder and He explains the purpose of the Law is to reconcile with each other so that anger is not capable of reaching the point of murder. We have heard each other say, "I'm so angry I could kill them." Of course, in almost all cases of this, the physical act of murder is not intended, but Jesus is telling us this anger alone is what drives murder, therefore we must remove the anger from among us. Look around you and consider the massive amount of anger which exists between us, brother to brother, race to race, and nation to nation. Clearly, we have not understood.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the Earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Jesus continued His teaching to the crowd on the hillside, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you

are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

"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 moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Later Luke gives us another version of this same message telling a story of when Jesus speaks a parable of a man whose manager had been accused of wasting his possessions. He told the manager he could no longer be his manager because of it. The manager came up with a plan so that people would welcome him since he did not believe he could do any other jobs. He decided to go to each of his master's debtors and reduce their debt so that they would appreciate the manager and accept him. Jesus explains that the master heard of this and celebrated the manager for doing this saying, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Then when the Pharisees sneered at this Jesus told them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

Continuing to speak to the people on the hillside, Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than

clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Soloman in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But first seek His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Mathew tells us, “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

The miracles of faith

When Jesus came down from the hillside, He was met by a man with leprosy. The man asked Jesus to heal him, and Jesus did. He told the man not to tell anyone, but instead to go give an offering to the priest as a testimony to them. It is clear Jesus did not seek fame but instead sought *understanding* among those intended to be leading the people in God's way. As Mark tells us, that man, now healed from his leprosy, did not keep quiet. Instead, he was telling everyone. This made it so Jesus would no longer openly enter cities but would instead stay on the outer areas. Later a Roman centurion approached Jesus asking him to heal his servant who was back at his home. Jesus stated He would go to heal the servant, but the centurion explained he was not worthy of Jesus coming into his home and instead asks Jesus to just say the word and he knows his servant would be healed. The centurion explains that in the same way, the centurion would give a command to his soldiers and trust that it was done, his faith in Jesus trusted this too could be done. Jesus then told everyone following Him that He had not found such faith in anyone from Israel. This must have come as an insult to some. The people of the land were proud of their faith, and Jesus had just told them one of the soldiers from the ruling empire had more faith than they did. The centurion's servant was healed that very hour. He healed many others and many who were demon-possessed came to Him to have the demons driven out with just a word. Again, find faith! The words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Luke tells us that on the road, they came across a group carrying a coffin containing the only son of a widow who was distraught and walking with the group. Jesus had compassion on her, went to the coffin and touched it saying, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" then the man sat up, and Jesus gave the man to his mother.

Mark tells us a story of Jesus' first public display of driving a demon out of a man. As Jesus was teaching in a synagogue one day, a man who was possessed by an evil spirit approached Him and said, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God!" Jesus replied, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" Then Mark tells us the evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were truly amazed at this and spread

news of it all over the region. Mark also tells us that Jesus drove out many demons, but He would not let the demons speak because they knew who Jesus was. The time was not yet right for all to announce it. We will discover this more as we go.

On another occasion Jesus was teaching a large group in a packed room. There was a group who lowered a paralyzed man through a hole in the roof so they could get the man close to Jesus. Jesus saw their faith and the man lying on a mat and Jesus touched the man saying, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." When the teachers of the law, the Pharisees and Sadducees, heard this they exclaimed that Jesus was blaspheming. That is to speak about God without respect. Their point was to say that Jesus did not have the authority to forgive sins, and that forgiveness of sin can only come from God. However, Jesus responded, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier; to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins…" Then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." The man got up and walked away. Mathew tells us the people were in awe that God had given such authority to men. But there is more to this story. John tells us of an occasion prior to this when Jesus met a man next to a bath who was an invalid and when He healed the man, He told him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." When the Jews saw that man carrying his mat on the Sabbath, which was not allowed, they tried to find out who told him to carry it so they could accuse the person. The man didn't know who Jesus was or where He went so, they were not able to. But surely Jesus must have heard of it at that time, since on this next occasion He begins by telling the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Instead of telling him to take his mat and walk. Yet either way, they tried to accuse Jesus. How frustrating it must have been for Him.

Mathew tells us how difficult it was for the people of that time to follow Jesus. He explained to them that He had no place to rest His head. In other words, He did not settle in one place but instead needed to travel far and wide to spread His teaching. Those who wanted to follow would request to put their homes in order first, or to bury their dead first, to which Jesus would tell them, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Or, in another instance we will read about later, He would turn away a rich man who would not walk away from his possessions.

We are given another story of a time when Jesus was on a boat with a group of His disciples, and we are told by Mark that there were other boats near them containing some of Jesus' followers. A storm came up and threatened the boats. We are told Jesus was sleeping as the storm came on and the disciples woke Him fearing the boat would be destroyed. Jesus rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

We also discover that not everyone understood what Jesus did or said. One example is the story of a time when Jesus was confronted by two demon-possessed men who were reportedly so violent no one could pass by them. Mark only mentions one man here but describes the man as always roaming near the tombs, yelling out, and cutting himself with stones. They approached Jesus and said, "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? If you drive us out, send us into the heard of pigs." Some distance away was a herd of pigs. Mark tells us Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?" and the man replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." Jesus simply said one word to them, "Go!" and at that, the demons came out of the men and went into the herd of pigs, driving the herd of pigs down the hillside and into the lake killing all of them. We are told the people who were taking care of the pigs ran back to the town exclaiming what had happened. Now, we would think the people of the town would be grateful that Jesus removed the demons from these two men, but instead, upon seeing Jesus and the men who had the demons driven from them, the people of the town pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. Some say the people wanted Jesus to leave because they were afraid. But doesn't it also seem the pigs were more important to the people than the removal of the demons from the two men. How often does the removal of a dangerous issue get circumvented by our worries over food and money? Perhaps that was the fear. Understand!

Eventually Jesus meets a man named Mathew. We have already mentioned Mathew's writing to us a few times. Mathew was sitting at the tax collector's booth when Jesus met him. Mark and Luke tell us the name of this person was Levi. There is debate of why two different names are used for this person. Mark and Luke may simply have been mistaken. Perhaps Levi was Matthew's name, and it was changed as so many others were. Perhaps they used the name Levi to keep anonymity for Mathew. Regardless, this is not the point of the story, the point has to do with the response given to the Pharisees. Don't lose faith due to a name discrepancy! Jesus told Mathew

to follow Him, and Mathew did. Jesus was invited to dinner at Mathew's house where they were joined by many tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Despite the question not being directed at Him, Jesus said in response, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" Which we read in the words of Hosea. "For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

At one point, the followers of John the Baptist came and asked Jesus why they, and the Pharisees were fasting, but the disciples of Jesus were not. Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while He is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Jesus is trying to get the people to realize a new understanding of the law. With Jesus present, the old ways such as fasting were not required. But He tells us without His presence, without the kingdom of God being here, then we will mourn. But if we adopt a new understanding and put it with the old traditions they held, it will ruin the new.

Mathew tells us that as Jesus was saying this, a ruler came and told Jesus that the ruler's daughter had just died, and he wanted to know if Jesus would come to her and bring her back to life. Jesus agreed to go with him. On the way, a woman who had suffered constant uterine bleeding for years simply touched the corner of Jesus' robe. She knew that if she just touched His robe she would be healed. Mark tells us Jesus felt the power leave Him when the woman touched Him, and He looked around trying to determine who from the crowd touched Him. The woman presented herself and Jesus told her, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." She was healed at that very moment. Jesus continued to the ruler's house where He found flute players and a noisy crowd. Jesus told them to go away because the girl was only sleeping. The people laughed at this remark. Jesus entered the house, took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

On another occasion, Jesus was approached by two blind men hoping to be healed. Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They responded, “Yes, Lord.” Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you.” And their sight was restored. We are told Jesus warned them sternly not to let anyone know about it, but the two men spread the word over the whole region. As the blind men were walking out, a demon-possessed man who had been unable to speak came before Jesus. Jesus drove the demon out and the man began to speak. The crowd was amazed, but the Pharisees claimed it was by the prince of demons that Jesus was forcing the demons to leave people. This claim is further discussed on a later occasion.

The need for witness

Jesus began to understand that the large groups of people who started to come listen to Him, meant His disciples would have to assist further. He called them together, at this point He had twelve main followers; disciples- Simon (called Peter), Andrew (Simon's brother), James (son of Zebedee), John (James' brother) and these two brothers Jesus called Boanerges-sons of thunder, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Mathew (The tax collector), James (son of Alpheus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), and Judas Iscariot who would eventually betray Jesus. Jesus sent these twelve out instructing them to go to the "lost sheep of Israel" preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is near." He told His disciples to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and to drive out demons. Jesus gave His twelve disciples the ability to do these things. Find faith! But He didn't just blindly give them these abilities, it came with much instruction. He told them, "Freely you have received, freely give." He was telling them that they did not have to do anything special to receive this gift, therefore they should not demand anything in order to share it. He also told them not to bring any provisions with them stating, "for the worker is worth his keep." In other words, He was telling them that as long as they were doing the Lord's work, they would be provided for. Jesus told them to stay at any home which was worthy. He told them if they find that the home is not deserving, then leave it behind them saying, "I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement then for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

Jesus also warned His disciples that they would be under persecution from the authorities. He told them they would be jailed and beaten and brought before kings and judges so that they could bear witness of Jesus to those leaders. Jesus told them not to worry about what they will say, at that time they will have the word of God to say. Jesus explains that they should not fear these men. He tells them there is nothing done in secret that won't be made known. He tells them not to fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather they should fear the one that can destroy both the body and soul in hell. Jesus also told them, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a

man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." He was preparing them for the troubles to come. He sent His now apostles off by saying, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Note Jesus calls His apostles "little ones" as if they are children. Understand we are all children regardless of our age. We are all children of God.

Luke tells us Jesus addressed the twelve saying in similar fashion to the beatitudes, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." Jesus is saying to them that our time on Earth is a time for learning, teaching, and *understanding*. Then we will be born into true life. Those who seek the comforts of the Earth will not understand and therefore will miss out on the comforts of the true life. Understand these things!

Mark tells us that Jesus instructed them to go out in pairs of two and said, "Take nothing for the journey except a staff- no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

In the writing of Luke, we learn that at a later date, Jesus gathered another seventy-two disciples and asked them to be apostles as well. Similarly sending them out two by two. As we know many numbers in the Bible contain symbolic meaning. Seven, the number representative of the church, and two in this case symbolizing witness. These seventy-two later returned to Jesus and told Him how even the demons submitted to them in Jesus' name. Jesus told them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." We will discover this further in the revelation, but have we not already understood the breaking out of sin into the world at the same time as Jesus' arrival? "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Spreading the teaching

So, Jesus finished giving instruction to His twelve apostles. Note that a disciple is one who follows someone in order to learn from them, an apostle is one who is sent on a mission. Therefore, His twelve disciples were now twelve apostles. After finishing their instruction Jesus returned to His mission of spreading His teaching through the land. As He was speaking to a group one day, some disciples of John the Baptist reached Jesus and delivered a message from John who was still in prison saying, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" This question can be misconstrued without understanding. John was not doubting, it was simply another way for John to ask, "How are things going?" But understand that the question needed to be on topic. Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." Then as John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking to the crowd about John.

It is clear from this speech, that John was a commonly known man in the area. Jesus did not have to explain to the people who John was. He said to them, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in king's palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John." This means that John was fulfilling the work of all God's servants who came before him, noting that the prophecies foretold John. Jesus continued, "And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear. To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and

a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

Continuing to speak to the group regarding their wickedness, He denounced the cities where He had performed miracles. He was discovering that the people were more interested in coming to see a popular man perform what they considered to be tricks, applauding His miracles but not turning their hearts and minds to His teachings. He explained to them that if Sodom had witnessed the same miracles He had shown them, it would still stand today because Jesus was confident the people of that time would have repented. But it is clear the group He was speaking to, the cities He had already performed miracles in, were not repentant despite the evidence He had shown them. After announcing these woes, Jesus said to the crowd, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Luke tells us that one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner at his house. Jesus accepted and was sitting at the table when a woman who was known to be a sinful person wept at His feet and wiped His feet with her hair. She poured perfume on Him, and the whole time He was there, continued to kiss His feet. The Pharisee tried to denounce Jesus claiming that if He was a prophet, He would have known this was a sinful woman at His feet. Jesus replied saying, "Two men owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" The Pharisee replied, the one with the bigger debt. Jesus told him that was correct and explained, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been

forgiven- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus told the woman, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace." We must understand this does not mean we should sin a lot in order to be forgiven a lot. It simply means if we have sinned a lot, as long as we are repentant, regardless of our amount of sin, we will be forgiven. True repentance requires change. Understand.

Later John tells us that there was a man named Lazarus who lived in this same area and who knew the woman who kissed Jesus' feet. Lazarus was a friend of the family and meant a lot to many of those close to Jesus. Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill and in fact had died. Several days after his death, Jesus returned to the area with His disciples and told those close to Lazarus that he would rise again. One woman named Martha said, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus replied to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Martha replied that she did believe that and believed that Jesus was the Christ. Martha gathered some others from the house and the group went to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried.

Jesus asked them to remove the stone from in front of the tomb, and although they were worried about the state of the corpse, they complied and opened it. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Then in a loud voice He said, "Lazarus, come out!" At that, Lazarus came out of the tomb. Jesus told them to remove his burial wrapping and to let him go. It is this miracle that adds to the Pharisees attempts to kill Jesus. They discuss this miracle and determine that if the people choose to follow Jesus because of these things, then the Romans will turn on them and destroy them. It is clear they were playing on two sides. Caiaphas was one who told the group that they should recognize it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to suffer. But we also read that they considered killing Lazarus as well since many people came to see Lazarus after hearing that Jesus had raised him from the dead. Despite their own beliefs, they were having to acknowledge the cost it would have on all the Jewish people. Who are we to say they were right or wrong in this discernment. Jesus Himself tells us He has the choice to lay down His life and to lift it up. Knowing the many miraculous

things Jesus was able to do, do we not think He could have avoided His own coming death? It takes a lot of insight for us to understand these things.

Another time Luke tells us that Jesus was eating in the home of a Pharisee on a Sabbath day when a man suffering from dropsy came before Jesus and He healed the man. Jesus again told them it is good to help others even on the Sabbath. Then Jesus noticed how the guests would pick the places of honor at the table. Jesus told them, "When someone invited you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." He added to this, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Another example of this same message comes from a time when Jesus told the story of a Pharisee and a tax collector who both went to the temple. The Pharisee prayed about himself saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men- robbers, evildoers, adulterers- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." The tax collector kept his distance and with his face down beat his chest and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus said, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

As Jesus walked through a grainfield one Sabbath day, His disciples took some of the heads of grain to eat since they were hungry. The Pharisees saw this and accused Jesus and His followers of breaking the law since it wasn't lawful to harvest grain on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread- which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the

priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Mark quotes Jesus saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." The understanding here is that if the action is taken according to God's ways, how could it possibly break the law of God? To further this, God told Adam that men would have to work the ground. God established the Sabbath as a day of rest for us just as God rested on the seventh day. The Israelites were to gather manna for six days and on the sixth, gather enough for the seventh. They were meant to have a day devoted solely to the Lord. Jesus made it a point to devote every day to the Lord, trusting God to provide for Him, thereby He was the Lord of the Sabbath. We should all reach an understanding of this.

To further this understanding, Mathew tells us Jesus moved from there to the temple and the Pharisees tried to find a way to continue this accusation. They brought a man before Jesus who had leprosy in his hand. They asked Jesus if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus said to them, "If any of you have a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then Jesus healed the man's hand. But the Pharisees went out and plotted to kill Jesus. Hearing that they were plotting to kill Him, Jesus withdrew from that place and continued His teaching and healing elsewhere. He always warned people not to tell who He was which brings truth to the word of God Isaiah gave us, "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory." This quote of Isaiah found in Mathew is slightly misquoted as Isaiah stated that Jesus would not raise His voice in the streets. Obviously, there were those who heard the voice of Jesus in the streets, but He did not raise His voice. This refers to His calm demeanor and should not be misunderstood.

We hear another example of this in Luke as he tells us of a crippled woman who was present on a Sabbath day and was healed by Jesus. The synagogue ruler exclaimed to the crowd that they should only bring those who need healing on the six working

days and not on the Sabbath. Jesus replied, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

Continuing to pursue Jesus the Pharisees were present when a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus. Jesus healed him and the people were astonished saying, “Could this be the Son of David?” But the Pharisees said, “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.” Jesus replied, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Mark tells us that in many places, Jesus was looked at as someone who had lost their mind. This idea that Jesus Himself was demon-possessed was not limited. Mark explains that even members of Jesus’ own family had concerns regarding these things.

Then the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked for Jesus to show them a miraculous sign. Jesus answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be

three days and three nights in the heart of the Earth. The men of Ninevah will stand up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the Earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

As Jesus was still talking to this crowd, someone told Him that His mother and brothers were wanting to speak to Him. Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Jesus pointed at all His disciples saying, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

That day Jesus was sitting by a lake and so many people gathered to hear Him speak that He needed to get into a boat to address the crowd on the shoreline. He told them several parables beginning with a parable about a farmer who was sowing his seed. He said, "As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

It is at this time Matthew tells us the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why He spoke to the people in parables. As we already mentioned this is where Jesus enlightens us to this purpose in our *understanding*. And that purpose is just that, *understanding*. Jesus replied to them, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken

from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or *understand*.' In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never *understanding*; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, *understand* with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." Jesus is saying that those of us who take the time to understand the meaning of His messages will gain a knowledge which enlightens us to God's purpose for us. Those who do not take the time to understand these things will lose everything in the end. He is saying it is up to us to realize what God's purpose is for us in this life and without that realization when we reach the day of judgement, what will we say, "We didn't see the need to discover this understanding."? What other purpose could our lives have? The time has come to open our ears so we can hear, open our eyes so we can see, and open our hearts to the *understanding* we are intended to reach. Understand! Christian church, why do you continue to only teach the parable? At what point will you teach the *understanding*? Have you become so disconnected from your purpose that you lost the *understanding*? Jesus' disciples had the *understanding*, and it was written for us so that we could reach that *understanding*. Stop ignoring this most important message.

Jesus goes on to explain further to His disciples, "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not *understand* it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and *understands* it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Now do we *understand*? Jesus may not have shared that *understanding* with the large crowd, but those who were His close followers, His apostles, He gave the *understanding*. They are the ones

who wrote it for us so that we may *understand* and yet we still maintain our handicaps to this. We need to allow the seed to fall on our good soil. We must prepare the grounds of our lives to receive the seed. We must *understand*!

Mark gives a similar parable from Jesus saying, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Remember that Jesus is addressing the crowd regarding the topic of the kingdom of heaven. He gives another parable as it relates to this. "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Before we get into the next parables Jesus told the people that day, let's understand the meaning of the parable of the weeds which Jesus later explained to His disciples. He told them, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." The Son of Man is Jesus. He sowed good seed by giving us the messages He conveyed. Those of us who have prepared good soil for the seed will reach an *understanding* and be saved from the fire. We can know that we will not

be uprooted by the weeds of the wicked one as long as we stand firm until the time of the harvest. When that time is, no one knows except God.

Jesus gave the people more parables regarding the kingdom of heaven saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." And another He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." The understanding here is that the kingdom starts as a small idea to us, but as it grows, it becomes the greatest of all things. Up until today's time, we have seen how Jesus' teaching has spread, although misrepresented and misunderstood, it has been sown over all the Earth. The mustard seed has been planted; it is time for the tree to take root. The yeast has been added; it is time to mix it thoroughly.

These parables made true what the prophets foretold as read in the book of Psalms, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

He continued His parables to the crowd, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." The meaning here is once we discover the truth of God's purpose for our very being, that is when we can understand the kingdom of heaven. Once we reach that *understanding*, just as Ezekiel told us in his temple vision, we must stay that course. We must abandon all we hold dear to and follow that one purpose. When all do this, the kingdom of heaven will be here. Jesus was with the people of that time, and they still could not understand that the kingdom could have started on the Earth then and there! It is possible for us to understand these things now and prepare the way for the kingdom to come!

He continued, "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the

bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus asked His disciples, "Have you *understood* all these things?" They replied, yes and He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." He is telling them that since they have this *understanding*, they can share this message with those who do not understand, and the full *understanding* is that in order to bring about the kingdom of heaven all of us must not only understand these things but as Ezekiel said we must repent of our ways. Remember true repentance requires change! But let's not miss that Jesus told us we would not be able to bring about the kingdom of heaven. He has told us it will be His angels who sort the weeds and sort the bad fish. We also do not know when this will occur, but we cannot be caught off guard. We have been given the teaching which will spare us from the fire. It is not hard to understand that not all people will believe these things. Not all people will understand. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that all people can walk away from their belongings for the treasure of the field or the pearl. But each of us of our own accord can, it is a matter of whether or not we are willing to. Understand!

After giving these parables to the group of people gathered on the shore, Jesus returned to His hometown and began teaching there. But He was met with confusion as the people there knew Him from His youth, knew His family, and were confused with how He had the power to perform miracles and the wisdom He spoke with. They were offended by Him. He must have seemed to them as if He was just a man who thought Himself more righteous than they were. We have had this similar feeling toward others we have known on a personal level in our lives. How often have we disregarded someone stating their past as our reasoning without considering their current state? Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." Matthew tells us Jesus did not perform many miracles there because of their lack of faith. Luke also tells us about this, explaining that Jesus was given a scroll to read to the people which was written by Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then He rolled it back up and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus explained to them that

prophets from the past such as Elijah and Elisha did not perform miracles for the people in their hometowns but instead did them for those in the neighboring towns. The people got upset with Jesus that He would not perform miracles there for them and drove Him to the edge of a hill intending to throw Him off, but Jesus simply walked through the crowd and left that place.

Another example of this from Luke's writing was a time when some Pharisees came to Jesus and told Him to leave where He was, which was outside of Jerusalem, and go somewhere else because they heard that Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day- for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Just as Jesus predicted, Jerusalem is where He is eventually killed. He did His work spreading the news, but those who were meant to be His people clearly could not understand His teachings. Remembering this time on Earth is our preparation to entering into life, Jesus tells them they will not see Him again unless they *understand* these things and admit the truth about Jesus. In other words, they will not be allowed to enter into that life. This is not necessarily true today, as we know Jesus will return and we will see Him coming on the clouds although we do not know when, but are we prepared? Will seeing Him now be a wonder for us, or will it be a terrifying sight. Those who *understand* will marvel at this, and those who don't will be struck with terror. Mind the teachings and be prepared or else when we see Jesus again, it may not be a welcome sight for us.

The apostle John tells us another story of a time when Jesus stopped at a well which was said to have been dug by Jacob. Jesus was sitting by the well while His disciples went to get some food when a Samaritan woman came up. Jesus asked her to give Him some water to drink but because she was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew she was not allowed to give Him water. Jesus told her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." The woman asked Jesus who He thought He was to claim He was

better than Jacob who had dug the well, when He didn't even have a way to get water out of it. She did not understand the living water. Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman asks Jesus to give her this water so she would not have to keep coming to the well to get water. Jesus tells her to go get her husband first. To which she replies, she has no husband. Jesus tells her this is true in fact she has had five husbands and the man she has now is not her husband. At this, the woman claimed Jesus was a prophet, since there was no way for Him to know so much about her past.

Despite her realization she continued to denounce Jesus for being a Jew saying, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus replied, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and truth." The woman replied, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I who speak to you am He." Just then Jesus' disciples returned, and the woman went away to tell everyone that she believed Jesus was the Christ. His disciples tried to get Him to eat some of the food they got but Jesus told them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." They questioned if someone had brought Jesus food before they got there. Jesus told them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." Lord, give us our daily bread so that we might understand, repent, and change our hearts.

As Jesus was traveling and teaching His followers, John the Baptist had been speaking to king Herod. Herod had been conducting an inappropriate relationship with his own brother Philip's wife, Herodias. John had been telling Herod it was not lawful for him to have such a relationship with his brother's wife which made Herod angry and so he had John imprisoned. We read earlier that Jesus had found out about John being imprisoned. Herod wanted to kill John but because people considered John a prophet, he was afraid to have him killed. When Herod's birthday came

around, he was throwing a party to celebrate with many guests present. During that party, Herodias' daughter was dancing for Herod. He was so pleased with her dance that he promised to give the girl whatever she wanted. The girl consulted with her mother Herodias who told her to ask for John's head to be delivered to her on a platter. Since Herod had so many guests present and because he had committed to giving her whatever she wanted, he could not say no to the request. He had the executioner go and behead John and had John's head brought to the girl on a platter who then gave it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus what happened. When Jesus found out about it, He went off on a boat by Himself but the people who were following Him continued following on the land and were at the shore when Jesus returned from the boat. Matthew tells us Jesus healed the sick from that crowd.

As nighttime approached, Jesus' disciples urged Him to send the crowds away so the people could go get something to eat. Jesus responded telling His disciples to feed the people. They replied they could not because they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus instructed them to bring the bread and fish to Him and told the people to sit in the grass. He looked up, gave thanks, and broke the loaves. He gave the pieces to His disciples and they in turn gave them to the people. Matthew tells us they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples collected twelve baskets of leftover bread pieces. There were five thousand men there in addition to the women and children. This miracle holds the same meaning as the manna which was provided for the Israelites as they wandered the desert for forty years. God will provide what is needed and more as long as we are walking in His ways.

Jesus immediately had His disciples get in the boat ahead of Him and start off as He dismissed the crowd. He then realized the people wanted to force Him to be their king, so He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. When He was ready to return, the boat carrying His disciples was far out on the water. Jesus walked out onto the lake to make His way to the boat. When His disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified thinking it was a ghost. But Jesus called out to them telling them not to be afraid. Peter replied, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus told him to come, and Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus but when Peter saw the wind he got scared and started to sink. When this happened, he called out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reached out His hand and

caught Peter asking him why he doubted. The rest in the boat truly believed at the sight of this, that Jesus was the Son of God.

They landed the boat at Gennesaret and when the people there recognized Jesus, they sent word out and the people of the area brought their sick out for Jesus to heal them. Matthew says all who touched His cloak were healed. John tells us that the people who ate the bread when Jesus used it to feed the five-thousand, had searched for Jesus and later found Him. Jesus told them they were not looking for Him because He performed miracles, but instead because they had eaten the bread and had their fill. He was telling them to work for the food which fills the spirit, not just satisfies the body. They asked Him what they should do in order to do God's work. Jesus tells them the work God asks of them is to believe in the one who God sent.

Referring to the manna the Israelites ate in the desert under Moses, the people asked Jesus what miraculous sign He will give them so that they can believe. Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then the people asked Jesus to give them that bread from heaven. Jesus tried again to explain to them that He is that bread from heaven. He tells them that they have seen Him and still they do not believe. "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day." Then the Jews in the crowd started complaining that Jesus was claiming to have come from heaven when they knew His mother and father on the Earth. Jesus told them, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him in, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me."

He continues, "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." The people could not understand this message. They were hearing Jesus say that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. But they were thinking about physical things. They did not understand Jesus was speaking about the food of the

spirit! Jesus said to the group, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” John tells us that followers of Jesus left at that time, having too much trouble understanding this message. Jesus then said to His twelve apostles, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know you are the Holy One of God.” Jesus said, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” He was referring to Judas.

As Jesus was with these people, some Pharisees and teachers of the law came through once again trying to say that Jesus and His followers were not following the law. They accused Jesus and His disciples of not washing their hands before they eat which was the tradition of the people passed down from the time of Moses. Remember in our reading we learned many laws were written to assist with personal care, this clearly was one of them. Jesus understood that not washing before you eat brings potential for disease, but He also understood that it was not reason to punish a person. He replied to them, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you; ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’” Then Jesus addressed the whole crowd, “Listen and *understand*. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’” His disciples told Him that the Pharisees were offended at this, and Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” Peter asked Jesus for further explanation and Jesus explained, “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts,

murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'" This is another example of Jesus attempting to teach the core understanding rather than simply stating rules. Again, if we can understand the intent of the message beyond simply do this and don't do that, then we are closer to the understanding of God's purpose for our very existence.

Jesus then moved on to the region of Tyre and Sidon. There a Canaanite woman kept crying out to Him to the annoyance of His disciples saying that her daughter was demon possessed. Jesus had been ignoring her until she eventually knelt in front of Him saying, "Lord, help me!" He replied to her saying, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." Jesus knew this woman was Canaanite remembering they were descendants of Noah's son who tried to make a fool of Noah. He knew what type of person this was and that was the reason for His response. But the woman replied to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." Matthew tells us her daughter was healed that very hour. This is a clear example that Jesus knew all people were capable of dismissing their cultural background and committing their faith to God. He is willing to do that for each and every one of us if we are willing to have faith in what is right and change our ways.

Mark tells us in this region Jesus was brought a man who was deaf and mute. Jesus took the man aside and placing His fingers into the man's ears, spitting, and touching the man's tongue, He healed him. Mark tells us Jesus continued to tell people not to say what He did, but this is another example of the word being spread regardless of Jesus' requests for anonymity.

From there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee and up on a mountainside. A crowd of thousands followed Him and He healed many among them. Mark explains that the now apostles had been going out in groups of two, but on occasions such as the one we are about to read, they would return as a group before going out again. On this occasion as they were all together Jesus told His disciples that the crowd had been with Him for three days with no food and He wanted to make sure they were able to eat and be filled. His disciples informed Him they only had seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Once again, Jesus took the bread and fish, gave thanks, and broke it into

pieces. The disciples handed out the food to the people, and they all ate and were satisfied. The disciples collected seven basketfuls of leftover pieces. This time there were four thousand men in addition to the women and children. We can note here that the first time Jesus fed a crowd there were twelve baskets leftover and this time there were seven. There can be argument over this as Mark tells us the first group feeding had twelve left over and the second had seven. Twelve is a number which represents the twelve sons of Israel, the twelve tribes. Jesus also had twelve apostles who He tasked with helping to spread the teaching. Twelve is known to be symbolic of the rule of the kingdom of heaven. The number seven represents completion but also is used as representation of the church intended to pass on the message as we learned about with the seven lambs Abraham gave as a symbol of peace between those neighboring him and will discover further as it relates to the seven lampstands. The understanding we must reach here is that if we spread the teaching and understanding of all these things, we too will fill and satisfy all who follow in God's path leading to the kingdom of heaven. It does not matter if the twelve or seven were first. Christian church and those who love to spread doubt, stop arguing over these things. Jesus tried to teach us in many ways that food is necessary for the body, but the food of the spirit is that which matters most. Understand!

Jesus then dismissed the crowd and moved on to the vicinity of Magadan. The Pharisees and Sadducees once again tested Jesus asking Him to show them a sign from heaven. Jesus replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." And Jesus left. Let's understand firstly that we are no different in our time. We have heard many say that without some sign, they will not believe. Jesus has plainly told us we will not get any such sign except the sign of Jonah. So, we must again understand what the sign of Jonah is. It is not that a giant fish will carry us! It is that Jonah brought a message to the people of Ninevah, and they changed their ways. That is the only sign we have. Jesus shared that same message of warning with all of us that Jonah shared with Ninevah. But have we yet changed our ways? Certainly not! The time is now to recognize and understand the sign of Jonah, heed its warning and change.

Jesus and His disciples were crossing a lake when the disciples realized they had forgotten to bring bread along with them. It was coincidental that at that time Jesus told them, “Be careful, be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” The disciples thought He was referring to the fact that they forgot the bread, but He corrects their misinterpretation saying, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then His disciples understood He was telling them to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Luke explains Jesus’ use of the word yeast here referred to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Just as He spoke about the kingdom of heaven being yeast mixed into the flour; He was now saying the misinformation could be mixed in just the same. We need to teach each other the proper yeast to mix in with the flour. Understand.

Mark then tells us of another occasion when a blind man was brought before Jesus. We are told Jesus took the man outside the village, spit on the man’s eyes, put His hands on him and asked if he could see. The man said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put His hands on the man’s eyes and his sight was restored clearly. Jesus sent him home saying, “Don’t go into the village.” It is interesting that the people looked like trees walking around. How often do we consider the lives of trees?

John tells us of another blind man Jesus healed. When they met the blind man, His disciples asked Him if the man was born blind because he sinned or because his parents sinned. Jesus told them, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Then He spit on the ground, put the mud on the man’s eyes and he was able to see again. Jesus told the man to go wash in a pool and the man did. People noticed the man and questioned if he was the blind man they once knew, and he told them he was. So, they brought the man to the Pharisees who in turn questioned him greatly about how Jesus healed him on a Sabbath day, who the man thought Jesus was, and they even questioned the man’s parents to

ensure he was born blind. The man maintained that Jesus healed him, and that Jesus must be sent from God. The Pharisees were upset by this and told him, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” Then they threw the man out. Jesus later saw the man again and asked him if he believes in the Son of Man. The once blind man asked who the Son of Man is, and Jesus told him that it was Jesus Himself. The man told Jesus he believed, and Jesus replied, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some Pharisees heard this and asked Jesus if He was saying they were blind. Jesus replied, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” His point was that they knew what was right and wrong to do, they were not blind in that way, and so they held their own guilt. If they did not know right from wrong, what judgment could be made. In our time we blur the line of right and wrong in the same way the Pharisees did. Christian Church, you of all, should not claim to be blind!

After this, John tells us how Jesus began declaring Himself. Jesus told a group of people a message which is difficult to understand for most in today’s time as the message relates to a shepherd and the way the shepherd’s flock will know their shepherd’s voice and follow only their shepherd. This is a true fact. Not just sheep but many animals know their master and will follow only their master, running from strangers. Jesus explained to them that He is the good shepherd, and they should know His voice and follow Him. A group of Jews confronted Jesus saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus replied, “I did tell you but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” The Jews picked up rocks planning to stone Jesus, but Jesus said, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” They replied by saying it was not for the miracles but that they believed Jesus was blaspheming by claiming to be God. Jesus said, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’?” This is quoted from Psalms. “If He called them ‘’gods,’ to whom the word of God came- and the Scripture cannot be broken- what about the one whom the Father set apart as His very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because

I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” Then Jesus escaped them and left. We must understand this confrontation. God is the Father to all of us! We are all children of the Lord! Jesus mentioned the quote from Psalms, which refers to the writing in Genesis that God made us in His image. We are all intended to be given eternal life just like God Himself. But of course, it won’t be granted to us unless we follow Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly in God’s ways. As we have read, no others did prior to then, and no others have since. This is what sets Jesus apart from us. He was God, here in the flesh. We are not, but we are like God. Understand!

The Son of Man

When Jesus and His apostles came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked them, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Jesus asked, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” At this, Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then He told His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. This is an interesting part of the story. Firstly, it makes clear to us that many had still not accepted Jesus as the foretold Son of Man. Secondly it leads us to believe that even His closest followers were suspect of this. Jesus, having heard Simon Peter’s response, had renewed faith that His church would move forward.

He wasn’t wrong, it certainly did just that. As we have discussed a number of times now, the modern-day church has abandoned the *understanding* on which it was founded. Christian church, you have accepted, in most cases, that Jesus was the Son of Man, and you have spread that part of the message well. But your understanding of God’s plan has been lost, your intention otherwise has been misdirected. However, we can say surely it has been evidenced that Jesus’ church was built on His closest followers. All those who do not accept that Jesus was the Son of Man, wake up and understand! Lastly to this, the reason Jesus did not want His disciples to tell anyone He was the Son of Man at that time, was because the time for that knowledge had not yet come. Jesus knew this was a knowledge that needed to be accepted on a much deeper basis than just a small group of men saying it was so. However, when the time was right, the time of the resurrection of Jesus, then it would be appropriate for all to exclaim it.

As evidence to this timing of His title of Son of Man being announced, Jesus began talking to them about how He would be made to suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. He told them He would be killed and on the third day be raised to life. When Peter heard this, he exclaimed, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” At that Jesus replied, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling

block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men!" We need to understand Jesus did not think Peter himself was Satan. He was simply saying that kind of thinking belongs to Satan. No different from Lot's wife looking back as Sodom was destroyed, Peter was clinging onto what he held dear on this Earth. God's plan needed to proceed, and Jesus not only knew what would need to take place, He accepted it and needed His followers to accept it as well. Harsh words toward Peter, but nevertheless necessary for all of us to understand.

Then He said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Jesus was telling them not to be concerned with the suffering Jesus would have to face. In fact, He was telling them to welcome that same suffering upon themselves. He told them there is nothing on this Earth that is worth giving up our souls. There are those who say He was not the Son of Man because He said some of those standing there would not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, but this is misunderstanding. When Jesus is resurrected, there were those who were present at the time of this statement as well as witness to His resurrection. That is the meaning. Furthermore, those of us who wear a gold cross around their neck claiming they have taken up their cross, have clearly missed the meaning of this in multiple ways. Gold, that shiny metal we strongly desire, and a symbol of death mixed together to say we have given everything from our lives to follow Jesus… understand the error of this thinking.

In keeping with the theme of Jesus as the Son of Man we are next told a story of how Jesus went up a high mountain with only Peter, James, and John the brother of James. We are told that there, Jesus was transfigured before them. Transfiguration is a change to form, or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. Matthew tells us, as he was told, that Jesus' face shined like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. Luke tells us they spoke about Jesus' departure which would soon come. Peter offered to set up shelters

for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, but as he was speaking of doing this, a bright cloud enveloped them and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” The disciples were terrified by this voice and fell to the ground face down. But Jesus came and touched them saying, “Get up, don’t be afraid.” When they looked up Jesus was the only figure they saw, and they all made their way down the mountain. Along the way Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Again, Jesus knew the time was not yet right for them to make these claims. The disciples were still unclear about the prophecies of old stating that Elijah would come first, and they asked for Jesus to explain it to them to which He replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize Him, but have done to Him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist as the Elijah that would come. Oh, how blind we have been. Elijah was to come and restore all things, but since John the Baptist was that foretold Elijah and all things were not restored, then Jesus came and was put to the same suffering, how do we reach an understanding of this?

The answer is, we need to accept that John the Baptist was that Elijah, and that Jesus was the coming of the Son of Man. Remember when we learned about John baptizing Jesus and stating it should really be Jesus who baptized John and Jesus responded, “It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” John, Elijah, was to prepare the way for the coming of the Son of Man. Just because our forefathers did not recognize this does not mean we cannot. Do not expect Elijah to return again. All things have not been restored as the Christian church would have us believe. Look around and we know this to be true. It is up to us to prepare the way now. We must be like Elijah, like John the Baptist and prepare the way for Jesus. The suffering mankind caused Jesus did not restore all things. Jesus’ resurrection did not restore all things. But if we can be like Elijah having the faith to baptize Jesus therefore fulfilling all righteousness, only then will all things be restored. But we also know not all of us will be so full of faith. Jesus tells us many times that when we prepare the way, and He makes His return He will see to it that all things are restored, bringing about the kingdom of heaven here on Earth. The time has come to wake up and understand these things. Accept Elijah, and like Moses lead ourselves out of the oppression of the wicked one, and trust in the forgiveness of Jesus. Do you not see that this is what God is

awaiting from us? This is the next step we must take in God's plan. What that plan is though we still have not fully understood.

When Jesus and the others returned to the crowd, Jesus was approached by a man stating his son was demon-possessed and the disciples had been unable to heal him. Jesus was able to drive the demon out of the boy by simply rebuking it. His disciples asked Him why they were not able to drive the demon out to which Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Mark tells us Jesus explained, "This kind can come out only by prayer." We need to realize that even the most faithful of us carry some form of doubt. Just as Peter walked on the water with Jesus and still started to sink due to his lack of faith. But on the day of judgement when we stand in front of the Lord, this will be far more convincing than standing on the water, certainly our faith will be greater than any moment in our lives. But will that time be too late for us to stand on that faith? Isn't it better for us to show that faith during our lives? Many of us feel as though we are tormented by demons, but surely with proper faith we can drive demons from even our own spirits if we walk in all God's ways. By spreading the truth of God's purpose, we will be able to drive out many demons leaving them no place to rest!

After passing the crowd and returning to Galilee, Jesus told His followers again that the Son of Man would be betrayed into the hands of men and killed and on the third day would rise to life. The disciples were filled with grief. The last time Jesus had mentioned this to them, He simply stated He would be killed, now He was giving more insight saying He would be betrayed and killed. From there they moved on to Capernaum where Peter was asked by the tax collectors as to whether or not Jesus had been paying the two-drachma tax which was required by law. Peter informed them that Jesus does pay it. When Peter went into the house without saying anything to Jesus, Jesus said to him, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the Earth collect duty and taxes- from their own sons or from others?" Simon, known as Peter, answered, "From others." To which Jesus stated, "Then the sons are exempt. But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." In our modern world, this is a difficult issue for many of

us. It would be great if we could catch a fish and pay our taxes from its mouth. But as Jesus stated we need to avoid offending those who force us to be in a situation where those taxes must be paid. Again, as we just learned if our faith is great enough, we will overcome these troubles just as easily as catching a fish.

Mark tells us that John informed Jesus they had seen a man who was not one of them yet was driving out demons, and they told the man to stop. Jesus told them, “Do not stop him, no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”

The children as the greatest

During this same time the disciples began arguing over who was the greatest. They asked Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus called a little child to stand among them and said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.” Mark adds to this, “Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” The fact is, we are all new in life. We are all children in this life. Each of us is learning as we go at any age and along any step of the way. We have learned that each of us is wicked from birth. But it is up to the elders among us to teach the younger generation what is right from wrong, God’s ways versus the ways of the wicked one. Although we may be older, that does not mean we are not children. A ten-year-old is the elder over a five-year-old. An eighty-year-old is the elder over a seventy-year-old, but regardless of age using our understanding of time, we are still all children who are learning. We must humble ourselves in this way. We must admit when we do not know and learn how to discern the proper action in any circumstance. We must lead our children in righteousness and no longer teach them the ways of wickedness. We have much to change.

Jesus continued His message regarding the children, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

He is restating that we must treasure every child on Earth and lead the lost children back to God's ways. Jesus uses this same story in Luke's writing to give us another perspective showing us that we are all children of the Lord by saying, "When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Adding to this Jesus says, "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Jesus adds another story along these lines telling of a man who had two sons. The younger son asked for his share of the estate and receiving it from his father, he went off to a distant country and squandered his wealth in wild living. He spent everything his father had given him and had nothing left. He got a job tending pigs for a man there, but no one would give him anything. Realizing his error in living the way he had been, he returned home to his father to ask forgiveness and to ask his father to make him one of his father's hired men. As he was approaching his father's home, his father ran out to greet and embrace him. His father called for his servants to bring a robe for his son, put a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet, and prepare a feast to celebrate. Hearing of this, the older brother became angry and asked his father why he would throw such an occasion for his brother who had squandered his portion of the estate on wild living with prostitutes and the like but had never thrown such an event for him even though he had worked every day for his father. The father told him, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

The hardship of the following

Jesus then spoke about forgiveness telling them that they should try to win over those who sin against them by speaking to them and if they are not able to do it just the two of them, then to have witnesses to try to help in the matter and if that still does not work then to have the church assist and if that still does not work then to treat that person as a pagan or tax collector. This means if the person who sinned against us is not willing to change that behavior or even admit their wrongdoing then they need no place in our lives. He followed this message with, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on Earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." The first part of this makes it sound like we can come together, and God will grant us even the vilest things, but the second part clarifies for us that it must be in Jesus' name. Vile things will not be accepted in Jesus' name. Therefore, if we come together on anything that follows God's ways (in Jesus' name) then it will be so.

Along the topic of forgiveness, Peter asked Jesus how many times we should forgive? Jesus replied, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy- seven times." Then He continues to tell them a story explaining the kingdom of heaven, in which He tells of a king who wanted to settle his accounts with his servants. He explains there was a man who owed so much that he was unable to pay so the king threatened to have the man's wife and children, and all his possessions sold to repay the debt. The man pleaded with the king who took pity on him and cancelled the debt. Then that man went out and found those who owed him money and demanding his debt be paid had his debtor thrown in prison until he could pay it. When the king heard about this, he decided to have the man turned over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay back all he originally owed. Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

On another occasion, Luke tells us Jesus was questioned by an expert in the law, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked what he thought, and the man said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus responded that he was correct. But the man wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus told him a story of a man who was traveling a road from Jerusalem to Jericho which was known to be a common route traveled by

many, so it was plagued with robbers and other wicked intended people. The man was a victim of robbers, beaten, stripped of his clothing, and left for dead. Jesus explains a priest walked by and avoided the man walking on the other side. He tells how a Levite did the same. We should know both the priest and Levite were men of God but did not stop to help the man. Then a Samaritan saw the man and stopped to help him, bandaging his wounds, pouring oil on him, giving him wine, and placing him on his donkey to take him to the inn. The Samaritans were descended from the family line of Ephraim and Manasseh. They considered themselves to be separate from the Jewish group. Jesus asked the man, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" Now that we know the three in question were from different areas, the question of neighborhood based on location was being put to rest. The point was we are neighbors when we help each other. The man replied the neighbor was the one who had mercy on the man. Jesus said simply, "Go and do likewise."

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples stopped at the home of a woman named Martha. She had a sister named Mary; keep in mind many shared the same name. Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him while Martha was distracted by all the preparations that she felt needed to be made. Martha complained to Jesus saying, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." How many times have we seen someone frantically making preparations and thought to ourselves how over the top they are acting. Worrying and hustling about over every little detail which, in the end, is meaningless. We need not concern ourselves so much over these preparations, it is the preparation of our spirit to enter into life we must be concerned with.

Jesus then went to the region of Judea where large crowds followed Him, and He continued to heal many people. There the Pharisees came to test Him again saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" Jesus replied, "Haven't you read that at the beginning, the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." The Pharisees continued their

test asking why Moses commanded a certificate of divorce? Jeus told them, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” Let’s understand that just as God will break His commitment to us if we are adulterous, we are right to break commitment to another who has been adulterous to us. Time and time again we have read that we must remove those wicked things from our lives so that we are not driven to the same wickedness. Jesus’ disciples, hearing this, considered that it must be better not to be married. Jesus told them not everyone can accept this. He explained how some people were eunuchs because they were born that way, others made that way by men, and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. He simply stated, “The one who can accept this should accept it.” He was politely saying it does not matter if you are not willing to marry. But one thing we certainly must understand is that if we are to join together with another, committing to each other is the way to do it as Jesus had already told us that is the way it was intended from the creation of all things.

At that time some little children were brought to Jesus to put His hands on them and bless them. His disciples were surely on a constant task of crowd control and attempted to keep the children back, but Jesus told them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” He put His hands on them and then He left.

Then a young man came to Jesus and asked Him what good thing he needs to do to get eternal life. Jesus told him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” It has been plainly stated for us in the commandments what is good to do in our lives. Jesus is making the point that God is goodness itself. We know God is more than just that, He is our Creator, our Father, and has put so much effort into helping us know good from evil. By following His commandments, we know we are doing good. Also, we should note that Jesus stated, “If you want to enter life…” Notice He didn’t say eternal life, nor did He say the afterlife. He simply stated “life”. How do we understand that? Christian church, what do you say? Are you following the commandments to enter life? Our time here on Earth is not the life we are intended to live! Understand, we are

but children in the process of learning how to live so that we can enter the true life we are intended for! Eternal life is life; our current state is not.

The man continued his questions to Jesus stating he has followed the commandments and wondering what he still lacks. Jesus answered him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” The man went away sad because he was a wealthy man. Upon the man’s departure, Jesus told His disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Again, holding onto our earthly possessions keeps us from being perfect in spirit. His disciples asked Him, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Peter spoke up stating that Jesus’ apostles had left everything behind and followed Him, so he wondered what their reward will be although being careful not to call it a reward himself. Jesus told him, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

Jesus continues explaining this statement of the last being first and the first being last by telling them a story about a landowner who needed to hire some workers for his vineyard. In the morning, he went out and hired some workers, offering to pay them a denarius for the day. A few hours later he hired more workers, offering to pay them whatever is right. Again, the same a few hours later and again later he found some workers who had spent all day hoping to find work but to no avail, so, with only a few hours left of the day he hired them as well. At the end of the day, he had all the workers come up to get their pay starting with those who began work last. He paid them a denarius and continued paying each man a denarius regardless of when they started. As the workers who started early in the day got to the front of the line, they were complaining that the others were paid just as much for working less time. But the landowner told them they had agreed to work the day for a denarius, and it was his money so he could pay the others whatever he thought was right and dismissed them with their denarius. Jesus says, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Let's understand this in another way as it relates to the kingdom of heaven which is what Jesus was referring to. Have you ever been to a party and been the first guest to arrive? It is normal to help the host finish the last of the preparations so that when the last guest arrives, the party is all set. At the time of judgement, the first to enter into the kingdom of heaven will face a similar situation. Now we should consider those who first followed in God's ways will be the last to enter the kingdom. They are the ones who laid the groundwork for us all to learn, understand, and enter into the kingdom. Shouldn't it be the case that by the time Adam, the very first, enters the kingdom of heaven, he is met with a fully prepared celebration? No matter how we look at it, the point is that all are equal both the first and the last. This portrays how God balances equality.

In adding to Jesus' response to the man telling him to leave his belongings and follow Jesus if he wants to be perfect, Jesus tells the crowd, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters- yes, even his own life- he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." This is a difficult message to understand and takes much insight. Jesus has told us to love each other, and then He tells us if we don't hate each other, we cannot follow Him. Here is the understanding, we each put the burden of our worries, our doubts, our desires, among other things, on each other. Family, in particular, does this most. Family is important, but as Jesus told us we are all brothers and sisters under our Father. Those worries, doubts, desires, among other things which we place on each other, cause others to be oppressed. Yes, it's true! Each time we tell another we need even just a hug, we are asking the other to stop what they are doing and to give themselves to us. This need is a form of oppression. Giving is a form of love. This is what Jesus is referring to here. If we recognize that all of our lack of faith in the Lord is the stopping block to the kingdom of God and we recognize that our worries, doubts, and desires among other things are the result of our lack of faith, then we do hate our father, mother, sister, brother, wife, husband, children, even our own lives. Our very physical being puts us in a place of desiring these things. We need food and tell the others we are hungry, then they are burdened with comforting us, rather than us trusting in God to provide that which we need. This is what Jesus means. Carrying our cross to follow Jesus does not mean killing ourselves, but it means we understand we must be willing to give even our own lives so that we do not oppress those around us. Understand!

Jesus continues, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Our families demand from us and we from them, all from our lack of faith. We must be willing to give up all of that doubt, everything in our lives, so that we can find the terms of peace.

Jesus again told them He was going to be taken, condemned to death, mocked, flogged, and crucified. This time He gave more detail into what was to come. Then the mother of the apostles James and John came to Jesus and asked that they be allowed to sit at His right and His left in His kingdom. Jesus replied, “You do not know what you are asking, can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” They answered they can, and Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” This made the other ten apostles indignant toward James and John, so Jesus told them, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many.” How many more ways can we be told that we need not be concerned with ruling over one another?

Along the road to Jericho, there was a chief tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a short man and, in an attempt to see Jesus, he climbed a sycamore fig tree. When Jesus saw him, He called for the man to come down and that He would stay at Zacchaeus’ house that day. The people around complained that Jesus was going to stay with a sinner, as they referred to tax collectors as sinners. When the crowd said these things, Zacchaeus told Jesus, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my

possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus replied, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Zacchaeus was making the case that although he was a tax collector, he never took more than he was supposed to. He was also saying that he no longer valued his possessions and gave them willingly. This is Jesus telling us again that He was not here to save the righteous, but to save those who were lost.

As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, they came across two blind men on the roadside. The crowd following them told the men to be quiet as the men were shouting for Jesus to heal them. But Jesus went to the men, and the men told Him they wanted their sight restored. Jesus did so and the men followed Him. As the group approached Jerusalem Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead of Him telling them they would find a village ahead with a donkey and a colt tied there. He asked them to retrieve the colt, telling whoever asked that the Lord needed it. They did and as Matthew tells us this was to fulfill what the prophet Zechariah said, "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" Jesus sat on the colt and the crowd spread their cloaks on the road along with branches from the trees around the road. The crowd was shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Hosanna as they were using the word at that time meant savior. As He neared the city, He wept and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace- but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Are we willing even now to recognize that God was here with us, and we missed it? As Jesus entered Jerusalem people were asking who it was that had such a following and the crowd told them all it was Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

The conflict heightens

When Jesus reached the temple, He found that there was a market in operation inside the temple. This is one of few occasions where we read that Jesus showed His frustration as He went in and overturned the tables of the marketplace and He said to them, "It is written, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" Christian church, what say you? Explain your profits. John tells us once again the Jewish leaders asked Jesus to give them a sign showing His authority to overturn the temple the way He was. Jesus told them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jewish leaders thought this was a wild rambling as it had taken many years for the temple to be built. They did not understand Jesus was speaking of the temple of the body. Remember Ezekiel's temple. When Jesus is resurrected on the third day, that is the rebuilding of the temple.

Jesus healed many who were there and as the children were still shouting praise to Him, the chief priests and teachers of the law approached Him asking if He heard what the children were saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Jesus replied, "Yes, have you not read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" This is a quote from the book of psalms; another prophecy comes into being. John tells us many people witnessed what Jesus was doing and believed in His name, "But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man." Let's consider this another way, saying we believe in Jesus is not enough. Satan believes in Jesus but that does not give Satan the right to eternal life. We must repent and change our ways! At that, Jesus left the city and spent the night in a neighboring town of Bethany.

The apostle John tells us of a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council, who met with Jesus secretly at night. Nicodemus was telling Jesus that he believed Jesus must be a teacher sent from God because of the miraculous signs He showed them. Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus didn't understand and asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases.

You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus still didn't understand and asked, "How can this be?" Jesus replied, "You are Israel's teacher, and do not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven- the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." As we have briefly discovered, this time on the Earth is the beginning of life. We are born of water and flesh. But our spirits are only children. We are learning good and evil. We must be born again into eternal life. Understand only those who choose good, only those who hear the Word will be chosen to be born into eternal life. Christian church, Jesus is not saying that we can say to others, "I believe in Jesus." and immediately we are cleared for entrance into eternal life! Jesus is telling us we love darkness because it hides our sin. We must not just say "I believe in Jesus." we must instead live by the truth so we can stand in the light, showing that our actions were with God, not with wickedness. Each of us has some wickedness in our pasts. This is why Jesus says we must be born again. We have learned in our time here on Earth, good and evil. Now we can be born again and live without wickedness but only if we understand!

The next morning Jesus was hungry as He made His way into the city again and coming across a fig tree, He was hoping to get something to eat from it, but the tree had no fruit. He told the tree it would never have fruit again and it immediately

withered. His disciples asked Him about how this happened to which He told them again, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but you can also say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” Here is another discrepancy between the gospels written about Jesus’ life. Mark tells us that Jesus rebuked the tree, then turned over the tables in the temple, then the next day they saw the tree was withered. Again, stop spreading doubt. These small inconsistencies of timing have no bearing on the meaning of the stories. We see many occurrences today of witnesses being asked to recall occurrences and getting different variations from each witness. This does not mean the events didn’t happen. Correct our thinking to focus on understanding the meaning instead of arguing over that which holds no matter to the purpose.

Jesus entered the courtyard of the temple and as He was teaching there, the chief priests and elders once again came to challenge Him asking, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism- where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?” The men did not know how to respond because if they said from heaven, then why didn’t they believe Him and if they said from men the people would contend with them because the people believed that John was a true prophet, so the men replied with, “We do not know.” Jesus answered them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” He furthers this by giving them a few parables.

He told them a man had two sons and asked the first to work in the vineyard that day. The son said he would not but changed his mind and did go out to work. The second son said he would work and did not go out to work. Jesus asked them, “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” They responded the first did. Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.” The tax collectors and prostitutes are represented by the first son, the one who ended up doing what their father asked of them. The chief priests and elders are like the second son, saying they would go out to do the work, but not doing it.

He moved on to another parable telling them about a man who planted a vineyard then rented it to some farmers to work it for him and he went away. He later sent some of his servants to collect the fruit from the vineyard, but the farmers beat one, stoned one, and killed the other. So, the man sent more servants who were treated the same way. Finally, the man sent his son, but the farmers decided they would kill the son and take the inheritance. Jesus says, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" The chief priests and elders replied, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus replied, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" This is another quote from Psalms. He continued, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." Christian church, are you not acting in the same way as these wicked tenants? Even the chief priests and Pharisees of that time understood Jesus was talking about them. Jesus stated that if you fall on that stone, you will be broken to pieces, and if that stone falls on you, you will be crushed. We must understand that falling on that stone, means we realize the error of our ways and feel broken, but we know Jesus can heal us. However, if the stone falls on us, if we don't realize the truth now, we will be crushed. That stone is the realization of the kingdom of God. Yes, Jesus is the cornerstone of that. John taught the baptism, the forgiveness of sins through the cleansing of the spirit to make way for Jesus who would teach us that each of us was capable of forgiveness but always keeping the message, we must repent of ourselves and change first! If we do not understand these things, we will be, not just broken but crushed. That is when the chief priests and Pharisees really wanted to start finding a reason to arrest Him. They refused to let Jesus continue saying they were not *understanding* the meaning of the law. They saw this as a rebellion.

Jesus furthered His message giving another parable telling them the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. Let's understand that both in the parable of the vineyard we just read, and this parable, the son is representative of Jesus. The king sent his servants to invite people to come to the banquet, but they refused. The king sent them again telling the people everything was ready for the banquet but still none decided to go, some even mistreating and killing the king's

servants. The king was enraged and sent his army to destroy those people. The king still had the banquet prepared so this time he sent his servants to go and invite anyone they found on the streets. Both good and bad were gathered, filling the banquet hall. When the king arrived, he noticed a man who was not wearing wedding clothes and told his attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus said, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Understand, God has the wedding banquet prepared for us! We have for too long now ignored His invitation and killed His servants who have invited us to join, so He opened the door for all. But we must still understand if we are not prepared for the banquet, we will be cast out. Knowing the chief priests and Pharisees did not accept John the Baptist as the servant calling them to the banquet and knowing they were not accepting Jesus as the son who was to be honored, in other words not being prepared for the event, Jesus was telling them they would be destroyed or cast out. We must understand that few are chosen! Prepare yourself to welcome the groom.

Next the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus into admitting breaking the law. They asked Him whether or not He thought it was right to pay taxes to Caeser. They thought if He said yes, His followers would disapprove and leave Him and if He said no, He would be breaking the law. Jesus said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me a coin used for paying the tax." They brought Him a denarius. He said, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" They replied, Caeser's." So, He told them, "Give to Caeser what is Caeser's and to God what is God's." The Pharisees were amazed and walked away.

Next the Sadducees came to test Him by asking Him a question. They told Him the law stating, Moses said if a man dies without children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Then they gave an example of a family with seven brothers, the first died with no children so the second took his wife and was also childless, then the third and all the way to the seventh. Then the woman died. So, they asked Jesus, "Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead- have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham,

the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for to Him all are alive." Matthew says the crowds were astonished by this. Clearly the Sadducees had been teaching people this law of marriage otherwise they would not have been so proud in their initial question. We find here again that Jesus is explaining to us that this life here on Earth is not our lives. This is the beginning, the teaching of how we can truly be born into life. Death does not exist for us if we follow in God's ways. We are starting to see how this all comes together, how we can reach true life by following the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We still do not know God's purpose but surely at this point we can all see how much closer we are to that *understanding* by knowing the events of the Old Testament books and having the *understanding* Jesus was trying to give us in all His teachings.

As the Pharisees were still gathered with Jesus, He asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They replied, "The Son of David." And Jesus said, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit calls Him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls Him 'Lord,' how can He be his son?" He's saying if David called the Christ, "Lord" how can the Christ be David's son? David knew God was the Lord as he said, "The Lord," meaning God, "said to my Lord" meaning the Christ. What would make David believe he was the father of the creator's Son? No one could say a word in response to this. Understand the purpose of Jesus' question to them. He was saying that they denied Jesus was the Son of God and instead tried to say it was a royal inheritance. Jesus was proving to them that God was His Father and His Lord, not David or some bloodline of people on the Earth. At that, they asked no more questions.

We are told by Mark that as Jesus was there, He watched the crowd putting their money into the temple offering. He saw many rich people throwing in large amounts of money and then saw a poor widow place two very small copper coins in. Jesus told His disciples, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything- all she had to live on."

At this point Jesus no longer holds back in His words against the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. It is a rather long speech He gives to the people gathered there, but it is one we must hear and understand. Christian church pay attention! "The

teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;" Phylacteries are small leather boxes containing Hebrew texts worn on the head or left arm. "they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on Earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and He is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

He continues with several woes, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you blind guides! You say 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like

whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in those days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!"

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on Earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" At that, Jesus left the temple.

On the way out, His disciples were paying attention to the size and number of buildings the city had accumulated. Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another, every one will be thrown down."

The signs of the end of the age

Jesus was once asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus told them, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

Later as Jesus was sitting on the mount of olives, the disciples came to Him privately and asked regarding His statement about the city being thrown down, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Jesus answered them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.” We can easily state all these things have come to pass. How many examples do we now have of people claiming to be the second coming of Christ only to discover their cults were led astray and, in the end, met awful fates? Wars, famines, and earthquakes have been consistent. Jesus is telling us these are the beginning of birth pains. What do we take that to mean? Jesus was born onto this Earth, His second coming will be like a birth as well, but it will be the birth of all righteousness onto the Earth. These things which we know have taken place are the beginning of that.

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” We know the apostles of Jesus did get handed over and put to death with the exception of one, John. But that is not what Jesus was referring to. He was, instead, referring to the original church itself. All who had the truth of the message were put to death, the message itself was put to death. All nations have hated the truth. We see it as too difficult to accept. All of the different sects of the church have betrayed and hated each other. Many false prophets have come and still show themselves today, like the false prophets of old always saying what we want to hear instead of telling the truth. “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he

who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel- let the reader *understand*- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." This writing contains the truth of the testimony and should be preached over the whole Earth because as we have already learned, the abomination which causes desolation is standing in the holy place. We are the readers, and we must understand this.

"Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now- and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." Jesus has told us a terrible time is coming but those days will be cut short for those of us who walk in all God's ways. "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There He is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect- if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There He is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here He is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather." Then Jesus quotes Isaiah, "Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Then Jesus tells us, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the Earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this race will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him." This is the only passage in the Bible which speaks about what people refer to as the rapture. The rapture itself is not spoken of anywhere. Just this statement of two people, where one is taken and the other left. We must understand this regarding the time of Noah. We are told people were going about their usual business, eating and drinking and marrying just as we do today. But the flood is coming, we have been warned. Of course, there is not going to be another flood as it was in Noah's time, but Jesus has already told us what is coming in so many different ways. We must be prepared. We must understand Ezekiel's temple and prepare ourselves. Because as Jesus stated where two people are, one will be taken and one left at a time undetermined by us. The word "taken" is not further defined for us. Therefore, we should not define it, rather we should prepare for it.

Jesus furthers this, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants of his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus states this in yet another way for us, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." How many other ways can it be said to spend our time *understanding* these things? Nothing is more important during our time here than reaching this *understanding*!

And yet another, "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came, 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not

scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" Consider the money in this situation to be the *understanding* of the message, the truth of God's purpose for us. If we hide that, we gain nothing for the Lord, but if we invest that knowledge, it will yield more for the Lord rather than just the one he had to begin with.

Jesus continued, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separated the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison, and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Christian church, your outreach intends to do these things, but you continue to draw a line in your servitude. Understand we are all Jesus' brothers and sisters. Each of us is a child of God, top to bottom, good and bad. Jesus is telling us He is the representation

of what all of us should be, true children of the Lord God! Therefore, if we are doing those things for each other, we are doing them for Jesus. As He told us, His burden is light. Simply be good to each other. Love the Lord God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. We are all working on the same *understanding*. The same truth to our very existence which aims to work for God's purpose. We must understand that purpose.

Mankind's greatest sin

After Jesus finished saying these things, He told His disciples that the Passover was two days away and at that time He would be handed over to be crucified. The chief priests and the elders got together and began plotting how to arrest and kill Jesus but they did not want it to happen during the feast so they would not start a riot among the people. Jesus and His disciples were staying at a house in Bethany where a woman came and put some expensive perfume on Jesus' head. His disciples retorted that the perfume could have been sold for a decent price and the money given to the poor, but Jesus rebuked them saying, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Didn't Jesus just explain that if we do these kind acts for each other, we are also doing it for Him, meaning we are doing it for all God's children? What is perfume or even money? It is nothing compared to the spirit. Understand sacrifice!

One of Jesus' apostles, Judas, went to the chief priests and elders and asked what they would give him if he was willing to hand over Jesus. They offered him thirty pieces of silver just as was foretold by the prophets, so Judas took the silver and looked for the right opportunity to turn Jesus over to them. We never read what made Judas take this action. Could it have been that he was upset with Jesus? Some say Judas had been taking money from the collective funds and was intent on getting money anyway possible. Perhaps he was afflicted by a lust for wealth. Luke tells us that Satan entered Judas and made him do it. But the truth of the matter is, Jesus' fate was bound to happen. It has been so clearly a part of God's plan that it was foretold many times prior. Do we blame Judas? Do we blame the snake in the garden? Isn't this the blame each of us is intended to realize within ourselves? Judas was drawn to do this. For those who can understand just as Jesus did, this was a necessary step in God's plan. Of course, for the sake of righteousness and to continue our learning, we will see that Jesus calls Judas out regarding this deception. Yet He doesn't fight it or run from it. He accepts it and still shows us that it is wrong. The kingdom of heaven was upon us, but we traded it in for thirty pieces of silver. We exchanged God for money. We are no different from Judas as we continue this practice today. We cannot serve both God and money. Jesus knew God's plan needed to proceed, but He also wanted us to

understand the error of our ways. We have already read that Jesus told His apostles one of them was a devil. We know the devil as Satan. This gives us insight into how Satan creeps into us and causes us to act as a devil, demon possessed into doing things we know are not right in God's ways. Disregard the thirty pieces of silver, we don't need it. We need our Lord and teacher to guide us. Repent of these ways! Understand!

Now the disciples were preparing for the Passover meal and at Jesus' direction found a home in which to come together for it. As they were preparing for the meal, Jesus took the time to wash the feet of each of the twelve apostles with Him. They were confused by this act, but it was a sign that Jesus was here to serve, in addition it was to symbolize that Jesus was cleansing them. After washing all of their feet, He told them He would no longer be there to do that for them, but that they should do that for each other going forward. We all need help to keep our spirits clean. Jesus intended that they help each other in this way, in service to each other.

They all gathered at the table, Jesus and the twelve apostles. As they were eating the meal, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." Of course, they all replied that surely, they would not. Jesus again says, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." As we just realized, betraying Jesus for anything, although part of God's plan, is the opposition which guides our understanding. Then Judas said, obviously being misleading, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered him, "Yes, it is you." Then He took some bread and just as He did when they fed the large crowds, He gave thanks and broke the bread into pieces for them to eat saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Let's understand the bread as Jesus' body. We know they weren't actually eating Jesus' flesh. As with so many other references in the Bible, this is symbolism. The bread symbolized Jesus living on this Earth, bringing the kingdom of heaven. Jesus previously told His disciples He had bread they did not know about. He taught us to pray, "Give us this day, our daily bread." He means knowledge of God and God's purpose. He was

telling them the bread represents His physical nature here with us, the knowledge we need to be able to understand God's purpose for us.

He offers the cup with wine in it, we know because He stated He would not drink the fruit of the vine. He says it is His blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. It is our sin which caused us to kill Jesus. We spilled that blood. So, we must be nourished with the knowledge of God's purpose for us and repent of the sin which caused us to spill blood from that very *understanding*. Then we can enjoy the sweet fruit of the vine in God's kingdom. Stop saying Jesus died, therefore our sins are forgiven. That is not what Jesus means. God said he would hang the weight of all our sin on Jesus- the peg he would drive into place. That is exactly what we have done; we hang all our sins on Jesus, never truly repenting, never changing. If we change our ways, Jesus will forgive us.

Understanding leads to repentance. True repentance requires change. True repentance brings forgiveness. Forgiveness is the greatest love, and it comes from *understanding*. God will cut the peg down. No longer will our sins hang on Jesus, they are ours to own.

They then sang a song and went out to the Mount of Olives where Jesus told them they would all be scattered. He quotes Zechariah to them saying, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." He means that when Jesus is taken and persecuted the rest of the group will have to scatter for a bit into hiding. But He tells them, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." He is telling them as He had before that, three days later, He would rise from the dead. In other words, go hide and when He returns, He will meet up with them to let them know what to do next. How difficult this must have been for them to believe. Even more so for us as we were not witness to the many miracles and knowledge Jesus showed them. Peter refused to believe that he would leave Jesus' side and told Him so. Jesus told Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Peter, as well as the others, continued to deny this. Then Jesus said to them, "When I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They replied, "Nothing." Jesus said, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag;

and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors;'" this was a quote from Isaiah, "and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." They told Him they have two swords, and He replied, "That is enough." It is clear that Jesus knew without Him present to serve as the target, the conflict against Him would be directed at His apostles. He gave no instructions to use the sword in any way; He only intended that they would have to defend themselves going forward.

From there, the group moved on to a garden in a place called Gethsemane. There He asked His disciples to sit in one area while He moved to another to pray. He had Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, the two whose mother asked them to sit on Jesus' right and left, come with Him to keep watch while He prayed because He was feeling troubled. He went alone and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." When He came back, Peter, James, and John had fallen asleep. Jesus said to them, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak." Let's start understanding this now. Christian church, you have missed this meaning. The first time Jesus went away He asked the select few He chose to keep watch. They were tired and fell asleep. So, no one was with Jesus and as we are about to discover no one will have a chance to find out what Jesus said in His prayer. So why then do the disciples write for us what Jesus said in that prayer? They tell us Jesus prayed to God to have the cup taken from Him. In other words, they must have assumed Jesus was praying for God to save Him from the death He was about to face. Let's continue, Jesus goes back out a second time to pray saying (or so we are told), "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When He got back this second time, the apostles were again asleep. This time Jesus doesn't wake them or say anything to them; He just goes back to His prayer. So, Jesus was here and told us to keep watch, we didn't, and we fell asleep. He then woke us, told us to keep watch so that we don't fall into temptation, and we fell asleep again. This time He does not wake us, only leaves us to our slumber and goes back to His prayer. Again, we are told He prayed for the cup to be removed and if not, then accepting God's purpose. Luke tells us an angel appeared to Jesus and strengthened Him, but in anguish He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When He returned this third time the apostles were still sleeping. He said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour

is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

So, we fell into temptation, we sought rest, we did not keep watch, and we were too late. We committed Jesus to His fate by our inaction. The Bible doesn't tell us how the apostles knew what Jesus prayed for in that garden. Perhaps He told them after His resurrection, but we can't know that as they did not write it for us. Why would Jesus pray for God to stop this plan from moving forward? Don't we understand, Jesus was here, the kingdom of heaven was here. It could have taken root then and we could have lived as one with Jesus at that time. Of course, it makes sense for Him to hope for that from God, He was hoping for the kingdom to take root at that time. But He also understood the challenges involved there. God knew too, the time was not right for that yet. But the teaching had been put in place. The error of all our ways shown in one evening in a garden and capped off by the arrival of Judas just as Jesus returned from that third prayer. John tells us that as Jesus was entering the city and people were laying branches in front of Him, Jesus said, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then those who were there heard a voice say, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." Perhaps this is more accurately what Jesus prayed in that garden. Regardless, we need to wake up!

Judas had a crowd with him carrying swords and clubs. Judas approached Jesus and kissed Him on the cheek which was the sign determined ahead of time to show who Jesus was so that they would know which man from the group to take. Judas said, "Greetings Rabbi!" To which Jesus replied, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? Friend, do what you came for." Jesus called Judas friend despite his betrayal. Even those He calls woes on He calls friend. Jesus knew this betrayal as part of God's plan. Remember the evil spirit of the Lord laid on Saul. The men grabbed Jesus to take Him away and as they did, Peter drew his sword and cut off one of the servants of the high priest's ears. Jesus told him to stop and put his sword away saying, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" Then Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. Again, what did Jesus pray in that garden? He knew it must be this way. He would have rather

we all understood at that time and welcomed the kingdom of heaven, but if we don't reach that *understanding* now, then it was all for nothing! It cannot be too late for this until that time which we do not know, when Jesus makes His return. Make ready now! Then Jesus said to the whole crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then the group of disciples ran separate ways just as Jesus told them they would.

Jesus was led away and taken to the high priest Caiaphas where other teachers of the law and elders had assembled. Peter followed but at a distance. They were looking for false evidence to use against Jesus but could not find any despite the false witnesses they were bringing. Mark tells us the accounts of these false witnesses did not agree with the others. They accused Jesus of saying He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Jesus made no reply to this accusation. Although we know it's true since the physical temple in Jerusalem was deemed by Jesus to be the wrong understanding and we know from both Ezekiel's temple vision and Jesus' teaching that we are to understand a new different form of temple, the one of the body which places God with our spirit at all times. Then the high priest said, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say, but I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." This was all they needed to call it blasphemy in their opinion, and they all said, "He is worthy of death." Then they punched and slapped Him, ridiculing Him and saying, "Prophesy to us Christ. Who hit you?"

Caiaphas' tomb has now been found. Inside of it were two Roman nails. Were they the nails used in Jesus' crucifixion? Perhaps, and perhaps not. But there was no other reason for two Roman nails to be found in his tomb. The question we must understand is, do we believe Caiaphas was against Jesus, or was he simply acting under the pressures of those around him? He would not have had these nails placed in his tomb in order to gloat. What purpose would that hold? He surely felt remorse for his part in leading Jesus to His death. The two nails- witness to the sacrifice of Truth.

As this was happening, Peter was just outside in the courtyard where a girl recognized him and said that he was with Jesus. He denied it to the group there saying, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Then he moved to a gateway where another girl recognized him and again, he said, “I don’t know the man!” After a little while the people standing there claimed Peter was with Jesus and they could tell by his accent. Peter cursed himself and swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Just then, a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered Jesus saying Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crows. Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

Early the next morning the chief priests and elders decided to condemn Jesus to death, so the next step was to hand Him over to Pilate, the governor. Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to death and felt remorse. It must be that Judas thought Jesus would escape the plot to arrest Him and now realized the gravity of the result of his action. Perhaps Satan released Judas, and his eyes were then opened to what he did. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders saying, “I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.” He then went off and hung himself. The chief priests, knowing it was blood money, decided to use it to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. Thus, what was spoken by Jeremiah came to be, “They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on Him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

Jesus was taken before the governor, Pilate. Pilate asked Him if He was the king of the Jews. To which Jesus replied, “Yes, it is as you say.” Pilate, in turn, handed Jesus over to Herod for further questioning. Herod was actually pleased to see Jesus as he had been looking forward to meeting Him whether with good intention or not. But as Herod questioned Jesus, Jesus gave no reply. Herod returned Jesus to Pilate to be dealt with. The chief priests and elders continued to accuse Him, but Jesus did not respond to them in any way. One story is that there was a custom of that time that during the Feast, the governor would release one prisoner who would be chosen by the crowd. The story says Pilate brought out a man named Barabbas who was a notorious prisoner convicted of murder during an uprising of insurrectionists. Pilate thought certainly they would say to release Jesus over Barabbas, but instead the crowd yelled for the release of Barabbas. Some say this custom never existed, perhaps Pilate was just looking for a way around this. Regardless, Luke tells us that Pilate insisted several times he should punish Jesus and release Him, but the crowd shouted for the

release of Barabbas instead. Pilate's wife sent him a message telling him not to have anything to do with Jesus, saying she suffered from a dream she had regarding Jesus. But the crowd maintained for him to free Barabbas. Pilate asked the crowd, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" The crowd answered, "Crucify Him!" Pilate asked them, "Why? What crime has He committed?" Their only response was, "Crucify Him!" So, Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood, it is your responsibility!" To which the crowd replied, "Let His blood be on us and our children!"

Pilate had no choice; he released Barabbas and handed Jesus over to be flogged and crucified. Of all the times we have read that the leaders forced people to be in a situation they did not want, we see here the reversal of that. We are no different than the people of that time. They wanted to protect their way of life so much that they released a hardened criminal and had an innocent man killed. Surely some thought Jesus was disruptive to their markets, their trades, their way of life altogether. And it's true. But that is just the disruption we need. The crowd said His blood would be on their hands and their children's. Don't we see that we are those children today? Do we need to keep the blood of the Christ on our hands today? No! So, why do we? Why have we still not seen this error and changed our ways? Even Judas saw the error he made, repented, and changed. Although he took his own life, which none of us need to do, he was repentant of the sin of his actions. We don't need to take our lives, instead we need to find true life. We need to repent of these actions and this mindset and change. Forgiveness stems from repentance and true repentance requires change! Understand!

The soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, stripped Him, put a scarlet robe on Him, and placed a crown of twisted thorn branches on His head. They put a staff in His hand and mocked Him saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" as they spit on Him, took the staff from His hand and beat Him with it. Then they took the robe off Him, put His clothes back on and led Him to the crucifixion site. Along the way they came across a man from Cyrene named Simon and forced him to help Jesus carry His cross. We also read that a group of women were following them weeping and wailing and Jesus said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed! Then 'they will

say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”’ Jesus was quoting Hosea, “For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

They reached a place known as Golgotha, meaning The Place of the Skull. From its name, it is clear that many must have been killed in this location. There they offered Jesus some wine with gall in it. Gall is a bitter substance which comes from plants. Jesus tasted it but refused to drink it. Clearly, they were finding another way to treat Him wrongly by offering this bitter wine on the way to His death. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Even in death, Jesus revealed the essence of *understanding*, mercy toward those who cannot yet see. There they put Him up on His cross, divided His clothes by lot, and kept watch over Him. We see many symbols today of the cross as a t shape. Historically most crosses were an x shape as that was easier to use. They would crucify people by the thousands, even lining roads with people strung up on crosses to put fear in the people of the area. Jesus was a figure they did not want any more attention being brought upon. It is hard to believe He would not have been placed on an x shaped cross but perhaps it was a t shape. There were two others, known to be robbers, crucified on either side of Him. He was just another in a daily occurrence of crucifixions. The only thing which would have set Him apart from the others was a sign they placed above His head saying, “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” John tells us that Jesus’ mother was there, as well as several close friends. Jesus told one of His disciples who was there, to take care of His mother going forward. Matthew tells us as people would pass by, they would insult Jesus and shake their heads saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” The chief priests and elders mocked Him saying, “He saved others, but He can’t save Himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” One of the robbers being crucified by Him insulted Him as well. But the other rebuked the man saying, “Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Typically, a person who was crucified would be on the cross for several days before they died. The act of crucifixion was designed to work in this way, causing great suffering to the person on the cross. It was that same day about the sixth hour and lasting until the ninth hour, darkness came over the land. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The people there thought Jesus was calling out to Elijah. One of the men there put wine vinegar on a sponge, placed it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. After having it, Jesus said. "It is finished." The others there said, "Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save Him." We need to understand a couple of things here. Remember people thought Elijah was the Christ. They show this in their thinking here. But what we must understand is why Jesus would think God had forsaken Him. He knew this day was coming. He had told His apostles that He would be taken and killed. But we can imagine how He must have felt on that cross, with little to no support around Him aside from a few who had been traveling with Him to help care for Him. He was being mocked and ridiculed by many who were there including many who had previously followed Him. Jesus knew His life would be taken, but surely, He expected more support from the people. They did not make a stand to save Him; they mocked that He should've been saving Himself. Jesus must have thought that all His work here on Earth was for nothing. Was this the only time we have heard Jesus doubt? Perhaps He needed to doubt in order to die. But we should understand that we caused that assumed doubt by not showing Him the support He deserved to see before His death. Jesus was and is a symbol, one which shows how we should live. Perhaps He meant the symbol of how we should live was being forsaken before His very eyes on that day. Think of it this way, He is the symbol of how we should live but He recognizes that way of living, led to His body being killed. His statement here comes from a Psalm which begins with this feeling of being forsaken but ends with promised hope. Jesus, the symbol of how we should live, felt forsaken in that moment, but as the resurrection will detail, the promised hope is revealed.

When Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He gave up His spirit. He died. At that very moment the curtain of the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom. The Earth shook, tombs broke open and bodies of many holy people who died were raised to life. Matthew tells us they came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the guards around Jesus saw the earthquake, they

were terrified and shouted, “Surely He was the Son of God!” There is much misunderstanding about the tearing of the curtain in the temple. There is this idea that the tearing of the curtain is symbolic that we gained immediate access to God by Jesus’ death. This is not true! Jesus dying on that cross was a result of our sin. It does not excuse our sin. We don’t have free access to God regardless of our actions. Christian church, why would you allow this understanding? The meaning is that the physical temple itself would no longer be the way to be near God. Jesus tasked each and every one of us with creating that space within ourselves. We must live as clean as the most sacred inner chamber of the temple. Do we still not understand Ezekiel’s temple vision? Bring about Ezekiel’s temple in each and every one of us. Allow Jesus to enter in from the east! We need to show that He was not forsaken by God or us! We need to drop the mysticism and understand the reality of the truth!

As evening time approached one of Jesus’ disciples, a man named Joseph, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body so that he could bury it in a tomb. Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had already died since the crucifixion process would normally have taken longer, and he had a guard verify for him that Jesus was in fact dead. The guard verified this by piercing Jesus’ side with the tip of a spear. Upon getting the confirmation, Pilate agreed, so the man, with help from Nicodemus, took His body, wrapped it in linen and spices, and placed it in a new tomb which had been cut out of the rock. He rolled a large stone in front of it. Mary Magdelene who was a follower of Jesus, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, sat by the tomb. Remembering that Jesus had stated He would rise after three days, the Pharisees asked Pilate to ensure the tomb remained sealed. Pilate sent a guard, and they put a seal on the stone and kept guard of the tomb. On the third day, there was a violent earthquake, and an angel of the Lord came and rolled the stone away from the tomb. The guards were so afraid of the sight that, as Matthew tells us they shook and became like dead men. The angel reassured Mary and Mary, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ Now I have told you.” The two women ran to tell Jesus’ disciples and along the way, they were met by Jesus. He simply said, “Greetings,” and the women fell at His feet worshiping Him, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Meanwhile, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests what had happened. Mathew tells

us the chief priests met with the elders and paid a large sum of money to say that Jesus' disciples came in the middle of the night and stole the body. That was the story that was circulated among the people.

When the women returned to tell the others, they at first did not believe the women. Matthew ran to the tomb, finding only the strips of linen laying there. As two of Jesus' disciples were walking to a village, they were talking about everything that happened. Jesus appeared to them, although they did not realize who He was, and walked beside them asking what they were discussing. They explained to Him what had occurred, telling Him how Jesus was taken and crucified and that they were losing hope as it was the third day since and they heard the tomb was empty, but Jesus had not shown Himself. Jesus replied to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" Then Jesus told them all of the scriptures related to Jesus from the time of Moses on. They reached the village, and Jesus went in the house with them. He was at the table with them, broke bread, gave thanks, and gave it to them to eat. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him and just then, He disappeared. The men then went to the mountain in Galilee where they told the eleven remaining apostles, less Judas, what happened, and that Jesus had risen from the dead.

As they were talking, Jesus appeared to the eleven there. Some doubted, while others worshipped Him. Jesus showed them His hands and feet where the nails of the crucifixion had pierced Him. He also had them give Him a piece of fish to eat all to show that He was there in the physical flesh. Jesus said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still here with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Here begins the age of the spirit, the continuation of *under-standing* in those who believe.

He opened their minds so they could *understand* the scriptures and told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." John tells us Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." The same spirit that breathed creation now breathed *understanding* into humanity once more. He then led them to the vicinity of Bethany, lifted His hands to bless them, and as He did, He was taken up into heaven. The book of John tells how one of the disciples was not present at this time, and that Jesus visited him at a later time. In addition, he tells a story of how some of the disciples were out fishing and Jesus appeared to them and shared a meal with them there, adding how Jesus told them to fish, and to care for His sheep. This does not fit with the other accounts, but we must remember and understand that the apostles were writing these things to certain people. John must have thought this was another way to say that Jesus sent them out on their mission to spread the word. Luke tells us that Jesus visited them over the course of forty days. We have read in previous books how forty days can be considered a time of trial. Perhaps Jesus was testing them before sending them out. The absence of these details in the other gospels and the presence of them in others does not dispute that one is truth, and the other is not. It simply adds to our understanding that Jesus rose from the dead, showed Himself to the apostles, placed His spirit on them and tasked them with spreading the message for us!

While Jesus was still living, He told the story of a man named Lazarus. We should not confuse this Lazarus with the one Jesus raised from the dead; they are different people. He said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So, he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to

go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham, he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The apostle John told us in his writing speaking about Jesus- the Word, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." We must understand we are all born of God! Each of us the children of the one true Lord, the "I am".

The apostles after Jesus' death

The apostle Luke wrote the book of Acts for us. It covers some of the acts of the apostles after the time of Jesus' death. Luke tells us that during one of their meetings with Jesus after His death, the apostles asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth." Luke tells us it is at this time Jesus is lifted up into heaven. Again, this doesn't oppose what we already read, accounts from different witnesses written to different audiences but all have the same *understanding* behind the message they convey. Jesus was telling them that they would be His witnesses, apostles tasked with spreading the teaching to specifically the Jewish community and areas, but eventually all the Earth. Now that the books written by these apostles have covered the Earth, we can know that His prophecy regarding this has been shown true. We will discover as we continue, that these apostles focused their efforts on the Jewish people and God will task another with spreading the message to the Gentiles, those who were not of the Jewish faith.

After the group witnessed Jesus being lifted up to heaven, the eleven of them came together for a meeting. We are told that Peter served as a spokesperson for the group, and he talked with them about finding a replacement for Judas. He references a quote from Psalms telling them that Judas should be replaced. So, he proposes two men who had been Jesus' disciples from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, meaning they followed Jesus from the time of His baptism to the time of His death. They prayed to God for guidance and cast lots, leaving it in God's hands to decide which of the two would take Judas' place among them. Matthias was chosen and so joined the other eleven, putting their number back to twelve. Jesus had told them they would serve as judge over the twelve tribes of Israel, and so replacing the twelfth spot was necessary.

Luke tells us when the day of Pentecost came (a day to celebrate the beginning of the wheat harvest and the giving of the Law), the twelve witnessed a violent wind which filled the house. They saw what appeared to them to be tongues of fire which came to rest on each of them. At that, they began speaking in different languages as the Spirit enabled them. This was not confusion like Babel but restoration, many tongues united in one spirit. Luke tells us that a crowd gathered when the sound of

the wind came up and the crowd listened to the men speak, each hearing the men in their native language. This means one apostle could speak one statement one time and each heard it in their language. How incredible a scene this must have been. But we are also told others who were present dismissed this and told those who were claiming to hear it in other languages that they must just be drunk. Even in the sight of miracles, there are still those of us who refuse to believe. Joel had given us a prophecy related to this very occasion when he said, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the Earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." It should not be difficult for us to accept that these men were given the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been told even greater events than this will come to pass. We must find faith and understand. The spirit of *understanding* had returned to dwell not in temples made by hand, but in hearts of flesh. This is the fulfillment of the story, the garden restored within.

Peter spoke to the people there about Jesus explaining that Jesus was crucified and was lifted up to heaven. He spoke in a way they could relate to explaining how the people placed king David highly in their regard, but even David did not get lifted to heaven, his body remained in the dirt, but Jesus did in fact return from the dead, in the flesh, and they were witness to this and to Him being lifted to heaven. Some of the people took this to heart and asked the apostles what they should do. Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off- for all whom the Lord our God will call." Luke tells us Peter had many other words for them but focused on, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Out of the group, the ones who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and Luke tells us about three thousand people were added to their followers on that day.

From this story, Luke gives us insight into how we should conduct ourselves as followers of Jesus. It is without doubt we can say this has been lost over the course of

time. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they needed. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Christian church, this was your official beginning. Who among you has fully devoted to the message, to the point of selling all your possessions and giving them to anyone as they have need? Who among you is meeting every day in public display, eating together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of those around you? Why do you continue to act as Judas did, hoarding your money to your own. Why do you compete over the best sanctuaries, and advertise your church in hopes of gaining more wealth instead of leading by example? Go back to your beginnings! Understand!

We are told that Peter and John were walking into the temple when they came across a crippled man who was there begging for money. They told the man they did not have any money to give him, but that they would give him what they did have and at that, they told the man to get up and walk. The man did and went into the temple with them. We are told the people were surprised and amazed by this. Peter, surely understanding Moses’ error in the desert explained to them that it was not Peter and John who healed the man, but it was faith in Jesus’ name which allowed the man to be healed. He condemns them for the way they dismissed and had Jesus killed. He explains to them that he understands they did it out of ignorance and that it was destined to be done that way. Again, all things to serve God’s purpose. Christian church, if you were pure of sin, if you were baptized and washed clean of all your sin, do you not believe you as well could heal in the name of Jesus? But the truth is that none of us are. We all carry our sin. These early apostles were blessed to have been gifted the Spirit, but also, we should understand what they sacrificed in order to live without sin. Peter told the people there, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.” Christian church, you hypocrites!

Luke tells us that as Peter and John were addressing the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees who heard them speaking about the resurrection of the dead, seized Peter and John and placed them in jail. The next day the leaders came together, including Caiaphas, where they discussed what to do with Peter and John. They had Peter and John brought in for questioning and asked, "By what power or what name did you do this?" referring to the healing of the crippled man. Peter declared to them that they did it in Jesus' name saying, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Then the leaders moved into a different chamber to talk amongst themselves about it. They asked each other what they are going to do with these two men. They realized the people knew Peter and John had shown them a miracle so they could not kill them or else they would have a revolt on their hands, but they thought it would be best to stop the men from speaking of Jesus anymore. So, they commanded Peter and John not to speak of Jesus anymore. Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." The leaders threatened them further and then released them since the people who were praising God for the miracle, caused them to be undecided on a punishment.

Peter and John then returned to their followers and reported what happened and what was said. They then prayed in front of all the people there, "Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the Earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the Earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.'" This is quoted from a Psalm written by David. "Indeed Herod and Pontious Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." From this, we know Peter and John understood that Jesus' death was part of God's plan. The time has come for us to understand that plan. Luke tells us that after they finished this prayer, the place where they all were gathered was shaken and all the people there were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly, just as they asked.

Again, Luke explains to us that the people who believed and followed them shared all they had, selling their land and giving the money to the community to be used as needed. Then we are told the story of a man named Ananias who also sold his property but instead of giving all the money from the sale, he kept some back for himself. Surely if he had needed it, he could've given it all and expressed his need. No, this was done in the way of Lot's wife, holding onto what he was supposed to be leaving behind. We are not told how Peter knew about this deception but only that Peter called Ananias out for it and when he did so, the man fell down and died. Then Ananias' wife came in not knowing what happened. Peter asked her if the money Ananias brought them was the full amount they got for the sale of their field, and she also told them it was. She had the same intention Ananias had to keep some of it. When Peter called her out in the same way, she too fell down and died. Luke tells us this event puts great fear among all the church members and all who heard about the event. Remember our understanding that we must fear the Lord. If we are honest and forthright in our faith and our following, then we have nothing to fear. This is the fear of the Lord. He can take our life at any moment. We know now from what we have read, that we don't die and immediately are taken up to heaven as so many would lead us to believe, only Jesus did this. Even King David remains in the dirt. We sleep until the day of judgment when we will be called forth. This is the fear of the Lord. Repent while we are still here. Correct our ways before it is too late for us! Christian church, you have acted as Judas and in turn acted as Ananias. Understand.

The apostles performed many miracles and those who believed would come out and join them. People started bringing the sick into the streets hoping that Peter's shadow would touch them as he passed by. All of them were healed, including those tormented by evil spirits. Their number grew and grew. We are told that because of this growth in their number of followers and believers, the high priest and the other members of the Sadducees arrested all twelve apostles and put them in the public jail. During the night, an angel of the Lord opened all the doors in the jail and brought the apostles out. The angel told them, "Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life." The next day, the apostles went into the temple courts and did just that.

The next day, finding the jail empty, the high priest and chief priests were perplexed. They were then told that the apostles were in the temple, teaching again. They

went to the temple, this time without force and brought the apostles to be questioned in the court. The high priest reminded the apostles that they were warned not to continue teaching in the name of Jesus and adding that the apostles were wrong to keep blaming the Jewish leaders for killing Jesus. Peter replied to them that they did kill Jesus and that the apostles would not stop teaching in Jesus' name. The leaders there were furious and wanted to kill the apostles. But at that point one Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and ordered that the apostles be taken out of the room for a while so the leaders could speak. Gamaliel told those who remained gathered about several other men who had claimed to be "somebody" as he worded it. He was referring to men who had claimed to be the Christ or some other form of leader from God but who were not truthful. He explained how all of them fell to some terrible fate, being killed and their followers scattered. His advice to the group was to let these men go, saying, "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." This convinced the group not to kill the apostles. They instead had them flogged and gave them further warning not to keep teaching in Jesus' name. Then they let the apostles go. Luke tells us the apostles never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

As the group of followers continued to grow, the apostles saw the need to elect seven members to help serve the people food and take care of their needs so that the apostles could focus on teaching the message. One of the seven they chose was a man named Stephen who was said to be full of faith and the Holy Spirit and who did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. However, there were some Jews from a sect called the Synagogue of Freedmen, who heard about Stephen and argued with him. They ended up persuading some men to falsely accuse Stephen of speaking blasphemy against Moses and God. Stephen was brought to court where they falsely testified against him. Luke tells us that those in the court saw Stephen's face like the face of an angel. The high priest asked Stephen if what they were saying was true. In response Stephen told them the full story from the time of Abraham through to Isaac and Jacob, Jacob's sons the twelve fathers of the Israelites, Moses and the Exodus, and how the people never understood God's message given through the prophets leading all the way to the denial of Jesus and His death. He told them, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They

even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." This made the leaders furious. Stephen looked up and told them that he saw heaven open and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God. When he said this, the people took him outside and began to stone him to death. Stephen prayed as he was being hit with the stones, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Then he died. We are told that as he was being stoned, witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a man named Saul. This man Saul was a Jew but was also a Roman who was in charge of finding and persecuting the followers of Jesus. Saul was there to verify that Stephen was in fact dead, and this he did.

From that day on, the followers of Jesus were persecuted greatly. Thousands of them were broken up and scattered all throughout the land. Stephen was buried by some of the followers. But Saul started going house to house arresting and persecuting those who spoke in the name of Jesus and those who believed Jesus was the Christ. The followers who were scattered as well as the apostles continued their outreach, healing many, casting out demons, preaching the word of God. Philip was one of the men who was out doing this work. He spoke to a group of Samaritans, and they believed and were baptized. We are told that although they were baptized, the Holy Spirit had not yet come to any of them. So, John and Peter went to them and as they laid their hands on the people, the Holy Spirit entered those people. There was a magician there at the time, who was well known for his magic tricks. He offered to pay John and Peter in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Peter answered him, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." The magician asked that they pray for him, and we are not told any response to this except that they moved on from that area. Understand that this magician used his tricks to get money from the people daily. He must have thought this was the intent of Peter and John. He was mistaken without doubt. Peter knew the magician was not walking in God's ways until he repented of this thinking and changed his ways. Remember we cannot serve both God and money.

We are told another story regarding Philip in which he is going down a road which God's angel instructed him to travel when he comes across an Ethiopian eunuch. This eunuch oversaw the treasury of the Ethiopian queen, so it was a person of high standing. Philip witnessed the eunuch reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked the man if he *understood* what he was reading to which the man replied, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" So, Philip explained everything from Isaiah's writing up through the good news of Jesus. The eunuch, having heard Philip's explanation, saw a body of water and asked Philip to baptize him in it. Philip did and suddenly after the baptism, Philip disappeared from in front of the eunuch and appeared in a different city continuing his work. This story gives us a clear realization that many have read the words of the books written for us, but without someone explaining these things to us, we can't *understand* them. We must now understand!

Calling to the Gentiles

The man named Saul who was the one persecuting the followers of Jesus was still threatening them. At this time, there was no official name for the group who believed Jesus was the Christ and spoke openly about it. They were called members of "the Way", the brothers, all the believers, and the Nazarene sect. Today we call them Christians which is a name used for them in the time around these events in the city of Antioch. So, from here on we can call them Christians to aid our understanding that we are calling ourselves part of this group. This will highlight for us the error of our ways. Christian church, what say you? Saul was heading to Damascus with a letter from the high priest intending to deliver it to the Synagogues and take the Christians as prisoners. While on his journey to Damascus, a light suddenly flashed around him, and he fell to the ground hearing a loud voice. The voice said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul replied, "Who are you, Lord?" And the voice responded, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Luke tells us that the men travelling with Saul heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul opened his eyes but could not see at all, so the men with him led him into the city of Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat.

Meanwhile, in Damascus, the Lord called to a man named Ananias. This is not the same Ananias we read about who fell dead in front of Peter and John, remember just as in today's time people shared the same name. The Lord told Ananias to go to a house and find Saul and that God was sending Saul a vision that Ananias would restore his sight. Ananias expressed his concern about doing this because he knew the reputation of Saul and so, was rightly afraid of him. But the Lord told Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Ananias goes and finds Saul explaining to him that Jesus sent him to restore Saul's sight. When he told Saul this, something like scales came from Saul's eyes and he was able to see again. He was then baptized by Ananias, ate some food and recovered his strength.

After this, Saul did go to the Synagogues in Damascus, but instead of persecuting the people there, he spread the word that Jesus is the Son of God. The Christians in the area were very confused about this since they knew who Saul was. The Jews in the area heard about Saul speaking this way and plotted to kill him, but Saul was able to

escape them daily. After hearing Saul's story of what happened to him on the road, the disciples began to accept him into their group. Since Saul kept getting death threats from some in the area, he had to leave there and began his journey of spreading the news of Jesus. Remember when Jesus told the apostles they would preach to the twelve tribes, Saul would now be the one to preach to all the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people.

Peter continued his mission going around and healing the lame, even bringing a woman who was adored by her community back to life. These miracles drew many more people to follow the Christians. One day Peter received a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners full of all types of animals. God told Peter to get up and kill and eat. Peter did not agree with this, saying that he had never eaten anything unclean. The voice replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." We are told this happened three times and the sheet was lifted back to heaven. The meaning of this was that Peter should not consider the Gentiles as any more unclean than the Jewish people. This is explained to us as a man who was a Roman centurion (a Gentile) and yet believed in God, is told by God to send for Peter. Peter visits the man in his house with a large group of people there. They explained to Peter that God wanted Peter to come speak to them and they were ready to listen to what Peter had to say. Peter said to them, thinking of his vision of the sheet, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right." He then goes on to tell them what happened with Jesus and how he was witness to these things. While Peter explained the story of Jesus to them, the Holy Spirit came on those who were listening. Those who were present and were already believers were astonished that the Holy Spirit entered even those who were Gentiles. Peter had those who received the Spirit baptized and he stayed with them for a few days.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was met with some hostility as the people there heard Peter went and stayed with a group of Gentiles. Peter explained to them his vision of the sheet and told them about the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit there. After explaining all this and pointing out to them that if God placed His Holy Spirit on these people, who was Peter to say that was wrong. Then the others understood and praised God for it. Meanwhile the group of Christians who had been dispersed when Stephen was stoned to death were mostly going around preaching to the Jewish

people, but some started to preach to the Greeks as well. The group in Jerusalem sent one of the disciples named Barnabus to the city of Antioch and there Barnabus ended up meeting Saul and the two of them spent a year there building up the church in Antioch. We are told by Luke that this is where the first use of the title Christians came about.

During this time, king Herod continued persecuting those belonging to the Christian church. He had the Apostle James, the brother of John, killed and saw that this pleased the Jewish leaders. He also found and arrested Peter, planning to have a public trial for him after the Passover. The night before the trial, Peter was sleeping with four guards around him when an angel woke him up, removed his chains, and walked him out of the prison. Peter thought he was having a vision since they were walking right past the guards unnoticed. When they got outside, Peter came to and realized God sent the angel to rescue him. Peter went to the house of John's mother to let them know what happened and to have them tell the others while he escaped the city. The next day there was a great commotion trying to figure out what happened to Peter, and the guards were executed. Around this time, King Herod met with the people of Tyre and Sidon as they had been quarreling with him about the food which they depended on him for. Herod spoke to them inferring that he was the source of their food instead of God and therefore God's angel came and struck him dead.

Barnabus and Saul were with the church in Antioch when the Holy Spirit told them to send Barnabus and Saul out to preach in many places. So Barnabus and Saul set out to spread the word as they went. They would meet up with other Christians and the other leaders of the Christian movement. They would report what they did and saw, as well as accounts of the people who believed and those who did not. It is at this time that Saul started to go by the name Paul. Saul was his Hebrew name, and Paul was his Latin name, he decided to start going by the name of Paul as it was more easily acceptable to the Gentiles. On one occasion they were met with a sorcerer and a false prophet. Saul, now known as Paul, explained to them their wicked ways, and called for the sorcerer to be blinded. At that moment, the sorcerer was. This caused others who witnessed it to believe in Jesus. It is important for us to understand that when these men were preaching to those who did not know Jesus, they were making it clear that the Jewish people had the books of the prophets which foretold Jesus and not only that, foretold Jesus' death. Despite their belief in the books of the prophets, they

were not believing in Jesus even though they brought the words of the prophets to truth when they killed Jesus. This was their hypocrisy, and it still exists in many places today. Stop saying we believe in this part of the text but not in that part. This was a large part of the *understanding* the early church members were trying to convey. Those who realized this error in their thinking were the ones who turned to God and received the Holy Spirit, were baptized and joined the Christian movement. All the apostles and Paul were now working toward this. Those who received the Spirit joined in this effort and spread the same teaching that if you believe in God, then you believe in Jesus and if you don't believe in Jesus then you are denouncing all of God's prophets, His very Word.

But they added to the message the good news of Jesus, which was that He rose from the dead, giving us evidence of life after death. This is the proof we needed to solidify our *understanding* of God, the I am. Without this proof of life after death, what would drive us to follow God's way in this life? Do we understand now? We are born on the Earth as new life, children of God. We are to learn right and wrong, good and evil. But more so we are to understand that Jesus proved to us there is life after death, but only for those who believe in it, who walk in God's ways of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Christian church, why do you spread the message saying Jesus forgives our sins so it's okay for us to continue sinning? Correct your preaching and return to the original message or you will continue to fail at bringing others into the *understanding* of the truth. Paul told the people, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses." Yes, Paul is saying everyone who believes is forgiven, but understand that he is, in all cases speaking to those who do not believe and those who thought forgiveness of sins was not available to them. Jesus explained we are all God's children and all sharing the same birthright under God. This is the meaning. It does not mean we can say over and over all day, "I believe" and therefore are handed forgiveness. This is not done in the name of Jesus. It does not follow what Jesus asked of us. This is false testimony. This is the greatest betrayal of the church. True repentance requires change and without repentance, forgiveness is not possible. We know what the story means now and cannot say we are blind, deaf, or ignorant. We can *understand* and therefore must repent in order to receive forgiveness. Just as they told the Jewish people of that time, they had the writings to give them *understanding* and if

they did not change their ways, repent of their sins, cleanse themselves in baptism, and accept Jesus as Christ, then the life promised us after death would not be for them. The same goes for us now. Understand!

As Paul and Barnabus spoke to the crowds, the Jews grew jealous as the crowds grew. They began to verbally abuse Paul and Barnabus. Paul and Barnabus told them, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you rejected it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:" He quotes Isaiah, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth." The Gentiles were glad to hear this. We already know how the Jews held God over the heads of the Gentiles using their faith in God to gain positions of power over the people. Jesus allowed for the Gentiles to be part of God's children and gave them freedom from this oppression placed on them by the Jewish leaders. But not all the people believed. Some even thought, because of the miraculous things Paul was able to do, that Paul and Barnabus were gods themselves. There were still those, both Jew and Gentile, who would persecute Paul and Barnabas, even to the point of attempting to stone them, causing them to have to keep moving on to the next city.

The church takes root

Each place where Paul and Barnabus visited, they would choose some from the group of Christian believers to serve as elders in the church in those places. Debates started to arise between the Christians who came from Jewish backgrounds, and those who came from Gentile backgrounds. Circumcision was one of those debates. The Jewish Christians believed it was necessary for the Gentile Christians to be circumcised. This debate was brought before the apostles and Paul and the other leaders of the Christian movement. Peter explained to them how God placed His Spirit on the Gentiles who Peter visited, without distinction. He explained as did others that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles to join the Christian church. James suggested that they write to the Gentiles telling them to avoid food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, meat of strangled animals, and blood. He says, "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." He is saying that the people are so set in their ways of abiding by these laws Moses wrote for the Israelites so many years prior, they could not so easily accept the dismissal or replacement of these laws. We should know better today. We can understand Jesus' message as it relates to these rules. As we've stated before, Moses wrote many rules for the people to follow which had to do with healthy living, but it is the purpose of the rules as a whole: to love our neighbors as ourselves and love the Lord God with all our heart, that we must abide by.

The apostles, Paul, and the other leaders agreed to sending this letter out to the Gentiles who were converting to Christianity. And so, they did. Although this letter is a compromise of sorts, it was necessary at the time. The Gentiles who received the letter were encouraged by it and so their numbers grew. Paul and Barnabus decided to revisit the cities they had already gone through to see how the churches were doing in those places. During their earlier travels a disciple named John had been travelling with them, but due to a disagreement John had parted ways with them. When discussing revisiting the places they had been, Barnabus thought it would be good to bring John with them again, but Paul disagreed since John had left them previously. They had an argument over this and Barnabus parted ways with Paul there. Christian church, even in your earliest days, you gave in to the specificity of the law of Moses and argued amongst yourselves. To this day, have you improved? The opposition you face now is nothing compared to that of the founding members, and yet you still bend and dispute amongst yourselves. Correct this now!

As Paul began his journey, he met a man named Timothy who was a disciple of the Christian movement. Paul got to know Timothy and realized he would be a good helper to come with Paul on his mission of spreading the word and so Timothy joined him. While reading the book of Acts where these stories are found and remembering that Luke is the one who wrote them for us, we notice in the writing at times, Luke says "we" and at other times calls Paul out by name. It is clear that Luke had close interactions with Paul, even travelling with him at times. This gives evidence to the stories Luke tells us in his writing about Paul. We are told that as they travelled, some were accepting them and invited them into their homes to rest and stay until they were ready to move on. Others were not so accepting and shouted insults at them or sarcastic remarks as they tried to spread the news of Jesus and the movement of the Christian church. At times they were stripped and beaten and thrown into jails.

On one of these occasions, as they were in jail, there was a violent earthquake and all the doors in the jail opened. The man in charge of the jail was about to kill himself, thinking he had somehow failed at his job and allowed all the prisoners to escape, but Paul shouted to stop the man since all of the prisoners were still there. So, the jailer took Paul and the other Christians home with him where they told his whole family about Jesus, baptized them and they became believers in the Christian movement. The next morning the jailer received word that Paul and his followers were to be released. Paul explained to them that they had been publicly beaten and thrown into prison without a trial even though they were Roman citizens. When those in charge heard that Paul was a Roman citizen, they came and personally escorted Paul from the prison and sent him out of the city.

As Paul continued his mission, he met many who believed and followed and many who argued and opposed him. We are told he performed many miracles, healing those who needed it, driving demons out, and in one example he brought a young man back to life who had died falling out of a window while listening to Paul speak. Each place he visited, even when he was met with opposition, he was able to bring more people to the *understanding* of the Christian movement. He was telling them the story of Jesus and giving them the proof of life after death, the proof of the resurrection which was what caused them to believe and change their ways. He performed many baptisms in the name of Jesus, which would allow the Holy Spirit to enter those who he baptized. Those who were baptized, then would go out and spread the message as well,

bringing even more into their number. He didn't do this in any one small area, instead he was doing it over the entire region going to places in, not only the middle east area, but also into areas of modern-day Europe. His outreach brought thousands into the *understanding*. As he brought so many people into the Christian movement, he drew a lot of attention from the Jews who opposed him. It had reached the point in more than one place that riots would break out when Paul was speaking to the people. One story even tells us how a group of people who made their living by making statues of other gods were complaining to the leadership that Paul and the rest of the Christian movement were compromising their ability to make money by telling people that the gods they made these figurines of were nothing. Even in that time, the people would not allow truth to interfere with their money. Understand.

As Paul was preparing to leave Ephesus to head to Jerusalem, he had a heartfelt goodbye with the Christians there as he knew what he would face in Jerusalem. He said, "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the Word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

When Paul arrived at Jerusalem, he first went to see the leaders of the Christian church there. They had some discussion regarding how the Jewish people were saying that Paul did not follow the laws referring to such things as circumcision and others such as how they should cut their hair. Paul agrees to the suggestions from the leaders to help some of the men joining their group to cut their hair in order to show he does

follow the law as well. Another compromise in the early days of the church. Perhaps there was need for it at that time, but Christian church, stop compromising the truth today! Remember the core of all the law is to love God with all your hearts and love your neighbor as you love yourself. What difference does a haircut make? Understand.

After speaking in Jerusalem for several days a crowd of Jews rioted and grabbed Paul, beating him and trying to kill him. As they were doing this, a group of Roman soldiers arrived with an officer and stopped the beating. They arrested Paul and asked the crowd what it was all about. The crowd was shouting so many things that the commander could not get a solid statement from them. Paul asked the commander if Paul could address the crowd. Paul explained to them all that he was a Jew, raised to follow the law and how he persecuted the Christians. He told them about the vision he had on the road when Jesus first spoke to him. He told them how he was blinded for three days and how Ananias restored his sight. He then told them how Jesus had instructed him to go and speak to the Gentiles proclaiming Jesus as the Christ and giving proof of life after death so that they might believe and change their ways. This made the crowd yell out, "Rid the Earth of him! He's not fit to live!" Paul was then taken and strung up to be whipped. As Paul was tied up awaiting his lashing, he asked them if it was legal for them to flog a Roman citizen. After realizing Paul was a Roman citizen, they stopped.

The next day they had all the leaders gather in the court and brought Paul in. Paul told them that he was in good conscience since he was doing God's work. The men lashed out and hit him across the face. Paul explained to them that he was also a Pharisee and was only standing trial because of his belief in the resurrection. This divided the council because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, but the Pharisees did, despite their disbelief in Jesus. Because of the uproar amongst the group, Paul was taken and put in the barracks. The next night Jesus told Paul, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

Rumor spread of a plot to kill Paul. They were going to demand that Paul be brought into the court again for further questioning and a group of men would be waiting for Paul to be brought in who would kill him along the way. The commander and Paul heard about this plot and decided to instead send Paul under heavy guard (hundreds of soldiers) to the Roman city, Caesarea. They sent a letter with him

explaining what had happened and that his case should be heard there. Think of this like a change of venue in our modern courts attempting to get a fair trial. They held Paul there until his accusers arrived to state their case against him. His accusers arrived and told the court, “We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”

In his defense Paul said to the governor, “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring these charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin- unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

The governor, whose name was Felix, decided to keep Paul in prison but allowed him some freedoms such as allowing Paul’s friends to come and care for him. But Felix never made any final decision in Paul’s case. He kept Paul as a prisoner for two years. He would meet with Paul often and hear Paul speak about Jesus and the resurrection. After two years had passed, Felix was replaced as governor and left Paul in prison as the controversy around Paul had not died down even two years later. Three days in, the new governor Festus took up Paul’s case and listened to the Jewish leaders about it. The Jewish leaders tried to get Festus to send Paul back to Jerusalem hoping to

have a chance to kill him in the same way they had previously planned. But Festus kept the case in Caesarea. More than a week later Festus started hearing the case. The Jews made many accusations against Paul but could not prove any of them. Paul simply defended himself saying, “I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” Festus asked Paul if he was willing to take the trial to Jerusalem. Paul told him that he is already standing before Caesar’s court and since he has done nothing wrong to the Jews, he should stay in a Roman court. In the words of that time, “I appeal to Caesar!”

While waiting for the right time to take Paul to see Caesar, the king Agrippa happened to arrive in Caesarea. He heard from Festus the story of Paul’s trial and wanted to hear from Paul himself. They brought Paul in before the king and Paul told him his story. He explained his background and how he was a Pharisee, following the laws of the Jewish people, even to the point of persecuting the Christians. He then explained how Jesus came to him on the roadway. He told the king how he started his mission after that, preaching to those in every place he went. He said, “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” He explained that was why he was arrested. He also explained that was why he was standing before them and testifying to these things. Festus then interrupted him, claiming that he was out of his mind. The king asked Paul if he really believed Paul could persuade him to be a Christian with just the story he told. Paul said, “I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” The king, the governor and the king’s wife all agreed that Paul was not doing anything deserving of death or imprisonment but since Paul had appealed to Caesar, they could not let him go until that was done.

So, they took Paul and started on their journey to Caesar. They needed to take a ship to get there and faced many troubles along the way. The ship met opposition from the weather constantly, they shipwrecked on an island and were there for some time. While there, Paul healed the sick who lived on the island, and they were given a new ship to continue their voyage until finally reaching Rome. Once in Rome, the Christians who were living there came to meet Paul. Paul was also given a house where he was allowed to stay with a soldier there to guard him. A few days after their arrival, Paul gathered the Jewish leaders in the region who had been eager to hear what Paul had to say since they heard a lot about what was happening with the Christian

movement around Jerusalem. After hearing Paul speak with them for several days, some of the Jewish leaders were open to what Paul was saying and believed him. Others did not. Some left when Paul said, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never *understanding*; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, *understand* with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" Luke tells us that Paul stayed in that house for two full years preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ.

The Bible also contains letters which Paul wrote to many people. The book of Romans is Paul's letter to the Roman church. It is one of the most encompassing writings when speaking about the *understanding* of God, Jesus, and what we are expected to do. Corinthians was written to the people of Corinth which was one of the largest cities of the time, located on a popular trade route and full of greed and lust. These letters written by Paul are addressed to the newly formed churches in the area. When addressing the Corinthians he calls out the ways he has heard that the church has taken to sin. He tells them he knows about their sexual immorality and that he has heard about their internal disputes. He gives them directions to help them secure their footing and to help the church grow. Some of these instructions require us to remember time and circumstances. Not every statement of Paul's should be considered as best in our modern world. There is much in his writing about how people should wear their hair, or whether women should be allowed to speak in the church. Jesus explained for us how the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which grows into the largest of the garden plants. This growth takes time and as time passes, just like the plants, we must grow around our obstacles and change our ways. The core of his message never relents. Paul openly admits that he understands we must all abide by the authorities which God has placed over us. Because of this, there is compromise in his writing. Christian church, the time has come to stop compromising. Grow around these obstacles, but do not lose the core of the truth. The plant must continue to grow for the kingdom to come. Instead, you have crossed an obstacle which has stemmed from the law and stopped your growth there. Another form of your betrayal. You have settled. Even in the very writings you base yourselves on, you are warned about this. It was

present at the very beginning of the church and to this day, you have not changed your ways. The time has come to understand, to change in order to show your repentance, and to do your work with greater fervor than any time since your beginning!

In his writing to the Galatians Paul addresses that the church there has fallen away from the teaching and has started to follow the teaching of others, being misled. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul gives very clear explanation that we are all God's children. Yes, we have already read that we are all God's children from the time of the flood. But Paul, keeping in mind time and circumstance, explains that we are all God's children by telling the Gentiles they have been adopted to be children of God through Jesus. Still today, there are those who believe they have the true faith in the true God despite not following the teachings of Jesus. Look at the disputes in the current state of Israel. Three separate groups, all claiming to be followers of the same God, yet fighting and killing each other to prove which of their gods is the one true God. When will we understand? We are all God's children! Jesus instructed us to love each other. Are you suggesting that Jesus was wrong, and God wants us to kill each other? Do you want your children to kill each other? Why would God? Why do we dispose of reason, claiming faith? You who act in this way are not followers of the one true God! Christian church, why do you remain silent about these things? Again, go back to your beginnings! Understand!

In his address to the Philippians, Paul speaks in lighthearted tone and expresses his gratitude toward them. It is amazing to understand that Paul was in Rome, seeing the Christians torn apart by lions in the arena and burned as torches in the palaces, and yet he found joy in his faith, and not only his faith but the way he saw the message being spread. It must have been his only comforting sight during that time. In his address to the Colossians, Paul writes to tell them to be careful not to follow the ways of men. He is referring to the way some will say, that in order to follow Jesus they must do this earthly thing or that one. A good way to understand this is the way we have seen groups pop up stating that if we follow these certain steps, we will find enlightenment. This is not true! Jesus did not tell us we would have to do a certain list of things to accept Him in ourselves. As Jesus told us, He is not asking a huge burden from us. He gave no instruction other than what is listed here: love God with all our hearts, walk in all His ways, see with our eyes, hear with our ears, *understand* the truth in our hearts, and change our ways.

When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them to stay awake. He warns them not to get lazy with their work in spreading the teaching. He also reminds them that we do not know when the day of the Lord will come, so they should stay ready for it at all times. In his letters to Timothy, Paul speaks about how the leaders of the church should act and how they should be chosen. He also talks about women's roles in the church being limited and how a Pastor should conduct themselves. We should again note here- time and circumstance. Not all of Paul's instruction here should still stand in our current time. Christian church, when will you let go of these old ways of conducting the church and like Paul, discern what would be best today. The best thing to do in today's time is finally preach the true message. Paul maintains the underlying message to us despite his controversial instructions. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul is preparing for his own death and giving Timothy advice on how to handle things in that event. Paul's writing to Titus carries a similar message as he is sending Titus to help the church in a very troubled city, but in doing so, he is instructing Titus on how to handle difficult places in general.

Paul wrote another letter to a man named Philemon. Philemon was a leader in the church and was also a slave owner. He had a slave who had run from him and was a fugitive. The fugitive was facing persecution and so was trying to hide in a Roman city, but Paul knew the slave's master, Philemon, and so wrote to Philemon asking him to accept his slave back and not only that, to be respectful toward him when he returned. Paul understood and told people everywhere that if they are a slave, they should serve their master well. But at the same time, it was clear he understood we are all brothers, and slavery did not need to exist. Paul's letter to Philemon was one of the first writings which make clear the absurdity of slavery.

The Bible also contains a writing directed to the Hebrew community. This was a group of Jewish people, descendants of the Israelites. The writing is directed at those Hebrews who were considering mixing the traditions of the law with the new covenant founded in Jesus. It is an interesting book which defines for the early church members what that new covenant under Jesus means. A good example of this is the way it describes how, in the early days of the Israelites, the high priest would enter the inner chamber of the temple making sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. It explains how Jesus bought this forgiveness from us with His blood. We do not need to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins in some stone temple if we live truly in God's ways just

as Jesus did. The temple is now in each of us and once we have repented truly, changing our ways, Jesus forgives the sins of our past.

Additionally, once we receive the *understanding* of these things, then we know that there is life after death in which we will have to face judgement, there is no sacrifice that makes our continued sins be forgiven. We must stop sinning in the first place. This is why the sacrifices were abolished. This is a good way to begin to understand the new covenant we have through Jesus and gives explanation to the priests as to why they can let go of the traditions of the old law. The book of Hebrews gives many examples from the Old Testament writings from Cain and Abel to Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, Moses, and even David. Each of these stories are written of in the book of Hebrews in such a way as to explain how Jesus' teachings to us do not dispute these writings, but in fact give evidence to the underlying meaning. It is all to help us *understand* what God's purpose for us is. But in this writing, that is something we still have not understood. There is debate regarding who wrote the book of Hebrews for us. It does not match the style of writing Paul used in his letters, so it is unlikely that Paul wrote it, but the content of the writing does show that it was written by someone who was in a high position of the early church. It is almost certain that the writer knew Paul, and they do mention Timothy at the end of the writing. So, we know it was at least written by those who were working to grow the early church.

Jude gives us a short letter as well. In it, he reminds them of the perils they will face by falling away from God. His message is a sharp warning. We also have a letter from the apostle James. In it, he reminds the people that it is not enough only to believe in God and Jesus, but we must act. He explains how our faith is shown through our actions. If we believe but we tell no one and do nothing to work toward spreading God's message, then what good is our faith, except only to serve our own interest. This too goes against God's way of living to serve each other. When our faith is kept to ourselves, we are self-serving. The apostle Peter also wrote letters to the church far and wide. In them he speaks a lot about the persecutions the church faced at that time. He reassures them that if they walk in God's ways, they do not need to fear the pains they will face in being persecuted. They can stand firmly that they will be justified in the judgment to come. He also warns them about members of the church who will try to confuse and distort the truth. He reminds them of the end of days which are yet to

come and that they must stand firm in their preparation for that time, whenever it may come.

The apostle John also wrote letters for the early church. In his letters he addresses the presence of Satan and the way wickedness uses deceit to throw off our faith. He mentions the antichrist, explaining to us that this is *anyone* who claims Jesus was not the Son of God, the Christ. He also speaks often to remind us of the one command Jesus listed above all others, that is to love each other.

Summary of the Word

To recap, we have now learned God created all things for a purpose we do not yet realize. We know that we were put on this Earth as part of the habitat. We have learned that the knowledge of good and evil is a test for us. We have learned that every intention of our hearts is wicked from birth. We have learned that it is possible for individuals to break away from that wicked tendency like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did. We have learned that the people who break away from that wicked tendency live separate from those who don't. We have learned that God is able to bring down punishment on mankind in whatever form He pleases, yet we also learned He does not do this without justification. We learned that all things happen to suit God's purpose, even those things which do not appear to be founded in the goodness and love we would expect, inevitably serve God's purpose. We also learned that God's chosen people were predestined for certain milestones.

God's chosen people were then divided. We have learned of the division of God's chosen people since the story of Cain and Abel. We have pointed out how groups of people defect from God's chosen people consistently throughout the written history. Yet, everything according to God's plan. At each breakout of people, God gives instruction that simply by returning to walking in all His ways, the people will be redeemed. In all history from that time until this modern day, we have not.

We know that God created all things. He created Adam and Eve in the garden and then created mankind on the Earth. We know that Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and were then cast out of the garden and sent to work the Earth with the rest of mankind. We know God's chosen people were joining together with mankind. We know the Lord grew tired of contending with mankind and was appalled at the wickedness which had infested His creation. We know that God does not fear correction and eliminated all life from the Earth, both His chosen people and the rest of mankind with the exception of only one family who God found worthy of saving. We know they were tasked with repopulating the Earth. We know during that course, at each generation, all fell from walking in God's ways except only one line. We know that single lineage ended up finding a home in Egypt and growing greatly in number without any of their lineage failing to serve God. We know the situation which caused them to be enslaved, and we know that God chose to save them. We also know at that time God determined that line of people needed a book of

law to follow and so provided it to them. We know that despite having the book of law, the people were not able to remain true to following God's commands. We know judges were raised to help guide the people in this effort but they too failed. We know the people demanded a king to help keep them in line, that too failed. Although prophets had been around, the true prophets of God had been few and far between. Understanding that a prophet is one who speaks God's word, a messenger of God's true message, but God clearly saw the need for His prophets more than ever. His message was being both lost and ignored.

But in all this, we also started to see a transition into the next phase for God's people. They were clearly being broken and divided. They were allowing the outside influence of other nations to corrupt their actions. The time for protecting God's people from these nations ended and it was time to start preparing them for the next step in God's purpose. Remember everything according to His plan. Both the good and the bad we have explored so far have been working toward His purpose. We have seen God send the serpent to Adam and Eve and place the evil spirit of the Lord on Saul. We know God caused the Israelites to become slaves in Egypt, and we know He freed them from that oppression. Knowing and *understanding* that both the things we consider to be good and the things we consider to be bad are part of God's plan, we can know there is always hope. Although the Judeans and the Israelites were in dismay under the rule of these kings, as the prophets would tell us, it was only going to get worse. But the hope was starting to show itself in the form of the prophets whose mission was to share God's word with the people. It was the transitional phase from protecting the Israelites from outside influence to the Israelites themselves becoming the outside influence. These prophets were sent to warn the people of what was coming and to serve as an example of how the people should spread the word of God to all the surrounding lands with the hope of one day returning to the promised land.

But we also read how the people didn't understand this promise. They assumed they were entitled to the land upon their initial return. As we read in Esther, God's name was not even on their lips. God recognized the people lacked understanding and therefore He would send His Son, the human manifestation of His very being, to teach us. If we wouldn't listen to the prophets, perhaps we would listen to God Himself in human form. It was the arrival of the Lord, the kingdom of God could have started on the Earth at that time, but we refused to accept it. Therefore, it became a way to teach

us the errors of our ways. Despite our rebellious wickedness, God was still willing to help us. But we didn't accept Jesus as the foretold Christ and instead of bringing the kingdom of God, we killed Him. But we know this too was serving God's purpose. The birth of the Christian Church took place. The apostles did their best to spread the truth of the message, although it was widely misconstrued and met opposition of every kind.

And so, now, here we are. At the point of the story which many would consider the end. And yet, it can't be as we still do not *understand* God's purpose. We can understand that God created this habitat with us in it. We should no longer consider that it was made for us, but rather that we are part of it. We were given the knowledge of good and evil as a choice for us. We made our choice, eating the desired fruit of that tree, and receiving the punishments God promised. But now after reading all of this and reaching a better *understanding* of good and evil, the Behemoth and Leviathan, Satan, society, law, love; what does that indicate for us when trying to understand God's purpose for putting us here in the habitat to begin with? Remember the cherubim placed as guard at the east entrance to the garden. God never told us that the garden was destroyed. We must realize the error of our ways so that the cherubim will reopen the garden for us. Not for us, we must accept Jesus and become one with Him so that they will open the garden to us. Remember Ezekiel's temple, the east entrance can only be accessed by Jesus and once He enters, the entrance is closed. The same can be said for the garden, Jesus can enter it from the east. If we are with Him, we too will be allowed to eat from the tree of life. But this too is not the purpose. This is just the beginning of our *understanding*. What good is the life we will receive after death if access to a garden is our only aim? There is more to our life after death. It is more than just the next generation. We know we should set up the next generation to live Godly lives. We know we should raise up a generation of priests. But what gain is there in the life we are promised? Perhaps we still have not discovered what answers this last remaining question.

The last writing in the book of the Bible is Revelation.

The revelation of Jesus Christ

In search of *understanding* the text, it's important to first understand who wrote the book of Revelation. The author calls himself John and tells us that he wrote it while exiled to the island of Patmos. Patmos was a penal colony of the time. That's all the information we are given and the only truth that we know about the person who put the words on paper for us to read. There is much debate on who the "John" was that wrote the text. The most common suggestion is that it was the apostle, John. The apostle John was the cousin of Jesus. He was the son of Jesus' mother's sister, or the son of Jesus' aunt. He was raised as a fisherman and had no formal education. He and his brother Paul were both followers of Jesus, the sons of thunder, as we read. John the apostle was said to be the youngest of the twelve disciples and would outlive the rest of them.

John the apostle was a bit of a mysterious character among them. His mention in the writings from the other apostles is limited and his own recounting of the stories are anonymous when speaking of himself. He was written about and known to be one of Jesus' closest followers being allowed witness to many things the others weren't. Perhaps, John had fully learned putting all glory to God and Jesus and did not look to take credit for any of his words or actions. Perhaps the others respected his desire for anonymity and thereby kept secret his role in their stories by exception. Or perhaps they were still bitter about John's mother's request for John and Paul to sit at Jesus' side. Regardless, the story is that John stayed by Jesus' side as much as he was allowed. It is said that at the last supper, John was leaned up against Jesus at the table. John was said to have been at the crucifixion and was the one tasked with caring for Jesus' mother after Jesus' death. John was also tasked with spreading the message of Jesus to the land of Asia (this would have been Asia minor at that time), no small task indeed. He did take on that task, but only after the death of Jesus' mother, fulfilling his duty to care for her.

John was then taken by the authorities and was to be put to death in a vat of burning oil. It is said that he survived unharmed. At this, the authorities exiled him to the island of Patmos where he spent several years teaching the people. He would eventually go back to Asia to continue his service and teaching until he reached a very old age. In fact, he lived so long that when he addressed crowds, he would have someone help take him to the front of them and would only tell them to love each other and

would say nothing more, as at that point in his life he lacked the energy to say more but also realized no more needed to be said. John is said to be the only apostle of the twelve who did not suffer a violent death.

Let's consider a bit more about who John was as a person. Imagine living in those times, growing up and learning the fishing trade from family. No formal schooling or education other than the life experiences had. The world they lived in was a growing society with many different cultures and personalities that clashed on a regular basis. Imagine struggling with the unfair rules of society and only wanting to do right in life, not so hard to do. It seems John felt this way as he was a follower of John the Baptist and was learning the way of life his forefathers had laid out for them- those being the early followers of God before the time of Jesus.

Now, imagine John meets this man named Jesus and follows Him for a while, listening to His teaching. Jesus is saying many things about how the laws of the society do not work toward the true meaning of goodness and love and instead work toward earthly values of wealth, power and control. So, putting that in a way we can understand, here is a group of rebels fighting against the accepted laws of the time and outlawed for their own personal opinions of things. Yes, their opinions were based on faith. A faith they got from witnessing so many wonderful things Jesus said and did. Regardless, everyone was telling them they were wrong to go against the laws which had been put in place.

This group of so-called rebels travelled the countryside teaching the true meaning of goodness and love to people. Let's not be too nice here though. The group of them were not all meek. They carried swords with them; they ran from the officials when they needed to. They were ramblers, yet because of the wonderful miracles performed by Jesus, they continued to have a following. These men were organized and calculated in their actions. Peter was known to be quick with his sword. Judas was the keeper of their funds. They each had a role to play in the organization of their efforts. They must have felt similar to so many of us in that they were working toward goodness but had to conform in some respects to the rules of society in order to fulfill their purpose.

John was said to be an overly compassionate, even effeminate man, yet he was also known to lash out harshly for the purpose of goodness and love. John was known for his insight and his thoughtful responses to anything asked of him. He was a man who must have spent a lot of his time in deep meditation of the true meaning behind things.

The apostle John is the author of the book of Revelation. The main argument against it is that there is no clear evidence he wrote it, and no clear way to determine it based on timeline. Of course, there were others named John at the time. However, the apostle John was gifted and entrusted with these visions because he was the one who would be able to relay the information with the insight and true meaning it deserved. The book tells of the deep love John was known to have and the harsh lashing out he was known to deliver. It fits. In the gospel of John, he does not speak of himself by name at all, then if he was the author of Revelation, why would he identify himself? Doesn't it make sense that it was to put an anchor of truth to the story? If we believe Jesus was real and we believe in the words of the bible based on that, then John may have attempted to put some justification to the text. It was certainly a text that defied full understanding and went against the laws of the people. Perhaps he thought that by allowing people to know it came from him, they would be more likely to believe he really did have these visions.

Regardless of the identity of the author, we can work with knowing it was a man named John, and he was imprisoned in exile on Patmos. The next step to *understanding* the text is to gain a better understanding of the symbolism used in it. This is a difficult task in today's time as so many years of change have separated us from it. However, in this time today, it is possible to work through it as we all have a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips by simply searching the internet, carefully.

John opens the book of Revelation by stating it is the revelation of Jesus given to him from God to show His servants what must soon take place. He goes on to say the message was made known by sending His angel to His servant John who testifies to everything he saw- that is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Ok so we are a couple of verses in and already have a lot to consider.

John says it is the revelation of Jesus. Revelation is defined as a surprising and previously unknown fact, especially one that is made known in a dramatic way. So, what is the revelation of Jesus? What is the surprising and previously unknown fact? What is the dramatic way it is to be made known? This is what we are to discover from the text.

John goes on to state how the message was to be relayed. He states an angel was sent to give him the message. Going into this text, we need to understand what an angel is. We all have our own preconceived notion of what an angel is. Some may envision a being like a human with a halo over its head and wings on its back, glowing with brilliance. We've created stories over the years of angels watching over us, guarding us, and guiding us. In the course of the Bible, as we have read, angels are used to serve many purposes. They do many different tasks for God. However, in all cases of reference in the Bible, angels' actions always serve to deliver a message. Either that message is given through action, vision, or words, but it is always a message we should receive. Why is it so hard for us to see the angels that are in our midst? John's angel may have come in a different form, but it was still holding true to the understanding that it was to deliver a message. A message of goodness from God. We can accept that if we are willing to. Perhaps after we listen to the message, not just hear it, but open our ears to it, then we are more willing to either accept or deny it for what it is.

John goes on to say that he testifies to everything he saw. Testimony is a public recounting of a statement which gives evidence or proof of something. In today's time in the United States when there is a court trial, witnesses are asked to place their hand on the Bible and sworn to tell the truth in their testimony in front of God and all others. Testimony is intended to give a true statement. This has been the case since the early days of the law. Even the ten commandments given to Moses listed not to bear false witness. We have no reason to believe that John meant anything other than to say, he is swearing in front of God and all others that he is telling the truth and nothing but the truth regarding the recounting of the revelation shown to him.

John goes on to say any who read the prophecy and any who hear it and take to heart what it says are blessed because he says, "the time is near". Let's consider prophecy and prophets. As we have read, there is much reference throughout the Bible regarding prophecy and prophets. They are the veins of the body of the text. The early

prophets told of Jesus' coming to Earth. As we read through the stories of the Bible, we see how the prophesies of certain people came true. There is evidence in this that the prophets who were prophets of God were true prophets and any others who prophesied other things, things not of God, were proven to be false. Since John had already identified himself, he was making it known to the people that this prophecy was not one to be written off as a false prophecy but instead was from God and therefore should be revered as such.

John continues his writing with a greeting to the seven churches in Asia. We can note here that the apostle John was tasked with leading the church in Asia minor and the seven churches that he addressed are the churches in the cities where the apostle John was leading his ministry prior to his arrest. Another reason for us to believe the apostle John is the author of the text and therefore the prophet of the Revelation. John greets the churches in such fashion with grace and peace from "him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth." Oh my, that's a lot to take in just in a greeting. Let's elaborate. John greets them with grace and peace. First of all, this is how we should greet each other at all times isn't it? With grace and peace. Can you imagine a world where everyone greets each other with true grace and peace? We do with our friends and family often, but not always, and if we are honest with ourselves, we almost never greet others with grace and peace. But that grace and peace John says doesn't come from himself, it comes from God who is and was and is to come.

John also says the grace and peace in his greeting is from the seven spirits before God's throne. What does this refer to? The seven spirits of God are written as Lord, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, counsel, power, and fear of the Lord. These concepts are difficult to understand and require us to reach an *understanding* of God as goodness. Once that *understanding* is truly reached, we can identify those seven spirits as the basis of goodness. Note the first and last of these spirits are related to the Lord. The first being the Lord over it and the last being the fear of the Lord over it. Those in between support the effort of *understanding* goodness as the intended prevailing purpose. It's ok if this is not fully understood or realized at this point in our exegesis of the book of Revelation but to reach a full exegesis of the Bible, the meaning

of these spirits must be understood. For now, let's realize that John understood the meaning of these spirits and his greeting of grace and peace is based in them.

John also says the grace and peace is from Jesus Christ, "who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth." This is important in our exegesis. We need to put ourselves in the shoes of the people of that time and understand they are in the early stages of accepting the truth of Jesus' existence and time on this Earth, and His transition which John was witness to. First let's understand why he refers to Jesus as the faithful witness. What is a witness? One who gives testimony to something they know. It's not hard, with a basic knowledge of the story of Jesus to understand He was one who gave testimony to something He knew. Since John witnessed Jesus' return from the dead, he was not shy about calling Jesus the first born from the dead. That one is fairly straight forward. The last part of the description refers to Jesus as the ruler of the kings of the Earth. This was a difficult one at the time when it was written as the kings of the Earth were the ones who put Jesus to death on the cross, and His remaining followers were being persecuted by the kings of the Earth, and according to the stories in the Bible, they had been persecuted by the kings of the Earth throughout history. So how then can John call Jesus the ruler of the kings of the Earth? Did they not rule over Him? This is the *understanding* of grace and peace. The grace and peace of Jesus is what makes Him the ruler over the kings. Because of His peaceful martyrdom, He had surpassed them and now was deemed to be above them and if His teachings could reach the masses, the kings of the Earth would no longer hold any power. Therefore, He is the ruler of the kings of the Earth, John just doesn't mention that the kings of the Earth do not recognize Him as such. It's a sad truth.

In John's greeting, he has shown us where his goodness comes from. It comes from his *understanding* of God as goodness and his knowledge of Jesus as the example we should follow in order to live with goodness in us.

John continues to give praise to Jesus. He further describes Jesus as "Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father" This is simple to understand knowing that Jesus extended His love to everyone, both Jew and Gentile, and allowed the forgiveness of our sins by teaching us the new way of *understanding* and showing us the

compassion that goodness intends. He made us to be a kingdom and priests as He tasked His followers with the creation of the church.

Then he gives a small prophecy intended for the churches in Asia minor. “Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the Earth will mourn because of Him. So shall it be! Amen.” John is speaking of the famed second coming of Christ. He is giving this to the churches in Asia as part of his greeting, and his text later goes on to expound on this.

He then gives the credit to God for the words he has written them by quoting “I am the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” The description John gives here relates to the description already given except here we have the addition of the Alpha and Omega. There are a couple of notes in our exegesis here. The seven spirits of God begin with Lord and end with fear of the Lord. Doesn’t the story of the Bible tell us that God created the Earth? The book of Revelation will go on to tell us how things will end in goodness but with much fear.

After his greeting, John tells of his circumstances. This is common in many of the letters contained in the Bible. It was typical for the letter to contain a greeting, followed by an update on the status of the individual writing the letter. John follows that format in his letter. He calls himself by name again and refers to himself as their brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus. How many of us understand that we are supposed to be suffering and patiently enduring in our lives? John understood this. You’re probably thinking how does that relate to goodness? How can we live with grace and peace when we know we are supposed to be suffering in this life? If we say we are not suffering in this life, then we can surely say if you are not suffering, then you are living for the wrong purpose. God weaved suffering into our physical nature. We hunger, we thirst, we desire. These things cause us to suffer enough; we do not need to add more suffrage to others. We can and must hold to grace and peace despite our suffering.

John tells how he is on the island of Patmos because of his testimony of Jesus and the word of God. He is giving them an update on his circumstances at the time he received the message. The detail to understand here is that he was being persecuted for his role in leading the church. He says it was the Lord’s Day, and he was in the

spirit when he heard a voice from behind him like a trumpet. Ok, so we have a few more items here to discern. On the Lord's Day, he was in the spirit. What does this mean? Have you ever been so deep in thought someone had to tap you or make a loud sound, or do something to bring you out of the deep thought you were in? Would you consider that being in the spirit? It's not hard for us to believe that being locked in prison, John likely had many opportunities to be in the spirit, but also knowing his devotion, it's not hard for us to believe John made it a point in his life to be in the spirit on the Lord's Day.

Then there is the matter of the voice from behind him like a trumpet. Here is one of the first gleaming examples of how we must read this text in order to understand it. It does not mean the voice was loud or blasted out like a trumpet. A trumpet to the people of that time was a symbol of warning. The people of the time were big on symbolism. We hear about it through all of the texts of the Bible. We were told repeatedly how to read the words and understand the symbolic meaning of things. Nothing is as simple as the words that are put in the text. John is saying he heard a voice from behind him offering a warning. Therefore, it was like a trumpet, the symbol of warning. Understand.

The voice tells John to write on a scroll what he sees and to send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These are the seven churches that John had founded and worked with in the province of Asia minor. At that, John turned to see where the voice was coming from. He saw seven gold lampstands and among them someone "like the Son of Man" in a robe that went down to His feet with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand were seven stars and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When John saw this, he fell down at the man's feet as if he were dead.

Well now, that's an incredible vision. There is a lot to digest there. Let's first discuss the someone "like the Son of Man." This is to say He appeared as a human. The rest of the description of that person is to show who that man is. The symbolism in the description is incredible. The robe reaching down to His feet in conjunction with the

golden sash indicates that He is a man of high standing. The white color of His head and hair represent purity. His eyes of blazing fire represent the presence of God within Him. His feet like bronze glowing in a fire shows His strength in standing in the presence of God. His voice like rushing water indicates that His voice was the spirit of Jesus (or life-giving waters) with power or authority. The double-edged sword from His mouth represents the word of God. His face being like the sun represents Jesus' light in truth. It is clear this someone "like the Son of Man" is none other than Jesus Himself.

After John falls at the man's feet, the man puts His right hand on John and says "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and hades. Write therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." This is plainly stated. The man is stating He is indeed Jesus. The part we need to reach a better understanding of is the symbolism of the stars and lampstands.

It sounds straightforward, however with further research, this message is not so simple in its nature. We will learn as we work through our exegesis, that the seven churches are not as simple as it seems. John is about to address a letter to each of them on Jesus' behalf and each of them is representative of a quality we need to possess. Those are insight, helpfulness, instruction, encouragement, generosity, guidance, and compassion. The angels of the churches again are the messengers. These are any who are tasked with relaying the messages of those seven qualities we should possess. The point is that the angels or messengers of those qualities need to be told the quality to address in their message. Then John continues to give us those seven messages to those seven angels of those seven churches. Ok take a moment here to understand the symbolism intended with the number seven. Seven being the number which represents perfection. In other words, if we understand the seven spirits of God, we can perfectly understand goodness itself. If we perfectly practice the seven qualities of the church, we can have perfection in our actions toward delivering the message of goodness. There will be more numbers for us to discover later.

As John begins the address to each of the seven churches he starts with a quote. "To the angel of the church in (name of city) write:" This is to show that it is not John's words but instead Jesus' words that are being sent to the churches. Remember John was known as not wanting credit and giving all credit to God and Jesus. This does not change and lends proof to his accounting.

The following letters to the seven churches highlight the betrayal of the church, and when understood and acted on, they are also the very thing which will remove that betrayal and bring the church into God's light.

The first church addressed is the church in Ephesus. Let's consider the city at the time Revelation was written. Augustus had become emperor and made Ephesus the capital of the province of Asia minor, replacing Pergamum as the capital. At that time, the city prospered greatly and was a major center of commerce and was also the seat of the governor. The city was known to be second only to Rome itself.

John, although showing the quotations, still affirms the words are not his by saying, "These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands" of course referring to Jesus, but also note he is using the description of Jesus as a leader of the churches, being the capital of the province, they should also act as leaders for the others. He tells them Jesus says "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

This message sounds too far removed from our understanding. None of us can truly say we know the city as it was at that time. Yet we are, in our exegesis, discovering the meaning behind the text. We don't need to understand the daily struggle of the

people there to understand the meaning of the message. Remember the churches also represent the qualities we should possess. In the case of Ephesus, the quality symbolized is that of insight. They are told they have forsaken their first love and are warned to remember the height from which they fell. They were now the largest city in the province of Asia minor, they were now the capital and were being warned to have the insight to not fall in disgrace. Despite the inevitable fall of the city, we should not understand this text to mean the church failed. We got the message from them. The angel did their part. They did not have the insight as a group, and they were lost. The message we receive is this same warning. Christian church, what height did you begin with? Was it not the presence of God in the form of Jesus, here with us on the Earth? Do not forget the height from which we fell, have the insight we need to keep our path on a line toward goodness for the love of others. For some this is hard to understand, but as we work through the rest of our exegesis it becomes clearer.

The next city addressed is Smyrna. Again, John starts with the same address. "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:" This time John gives a different description of Jesus saying, "These are the words of Him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again." Note the reference to the resurrection in this description and relate that to the message written to them. Then John proceeds to give Jesus' statement: "I know your afflictions and your poverty- yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." The quality in this message that we must derive is helpfulness.

Smyrna was a major seaport. However, they were not rich in materials or wealth. Due to their physical location and role as a seaport, they were constantly faced with outside influences and those who followed the church would have been persecuted by many different cultures. The helpfulness comes from the identification of their struggles and the promise of the reward for their endurance. Don't we feel better when someone tells us they understand our struggle, reassuring us that the struggle is real? Is this not helpful when we are feeling down about something? If we are told by getting through a difficult time we will be rewarded, doesn't that help us get through the hard

times? Christian church, many come to you, similar to a seaport. Yet, out of fear, you have not shared the true wealth. Instead of helping all find the true promised reward, you help by giving broken and segregated scripture tailored to ease a moment of pain. You avoid helping others find the promise of resurrection by allowing incomplete *understanding*. Be faithful even to the point of death. Remove your fear of mankind.

The next church to be addressed is Pergamum. Again stated "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:" This time Jesus is described as "These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." Note the reference here to the symbolism of the sword as the word of God. "I know where you live- where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city- where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

Let's discover what the meaning in this message is. Pergamum is the city that was the capital of Asia minor before the capital was moved to Ephesus. It remained to be a major cultural center and artistic hub. It was said to have an awesome library and housed the best therapeutic center in the Roman world. However, the city tried to gain its freedom and lost it to Rome. Their warning comes related to the influence of people from other cultures. The quality we are asked to understand from this is instruction. Here was the city with the best library in the land known for parchment and keeping of texts. They certainly had resources for instruction, yet the instruction came from many different cultures. They were warned to only follow or give the instruction based on the word of God. The reward for their repentance and endurance was promised to be some of the hidden manna which is symbolic of the truth in God's word. Additionally, they would receive a white stone with a new name written on it. That was a reference that certainly dates to the time, but a white stone used to be given to a prisoner who was cleared of their crimes and released. The white stone would have their name

written on it. This promise of a white stone would symbolize they are clear of an accusation against them, but the new name is something we obviously cannot speak about as it would only be known to the person who received it. Christian church, you are said to have the greatest library of scriptural writings. Why is your instruction hypocritical and unclear?

The next city addressed was Thyatira. “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:” Now we get another part of the description of Jesus, “These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” So, we know the focus here will be with regard to standing firm in the presence of God and with the presence of God in us. “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you). Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations- ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; He will dash them to pieces like pottery’- just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.”

The history of Thyatira is not well known. We do know they had a number of guilds including coppersmiths, cloth dyers, potters, slave dealers, and bakers. We also know they had ties to Jezebel. We know Jezebel was considered to be a symbol of those who claim to be of God, but under false pretense. As we should understand from our reading, she was known to symbolize false prophets. The quality we should understand from this message is that of encouragement. If we are standing firm in goodness, with goodness in us, and we avoid such false prophets, we will be rewarded. We are encouraged to hold on to what we have until the time comes. Then we hear of the reward. It

is hard to believe this reward is possible, but it has been promised. The reward is authority over the nations. The statement of the reward is followed by a brief excerpt from the book of Psalms giving a description of Jesus ruling with an iron scepter and dashing them to pieces. But the portion that gives us *understanding* is "just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star." Those two phrases run together as they should. The morning star is symbolic of Jesus. So, the reward is that we will be like Jesus, with authority over the nations. Remember Jesus was not in charge of the nations during His time on Earth. It was only after His death at the hands of men that He gained His power. He had to be martyred to gain it, but we are encouraged in that if we only hold to our beliefs and stand strong in the presence of God, we will be given this same authority. Christian church, let go of the wrong teachings, admit fault in this. Encourage others through your actions. The nations rule over you and it is your doing.

The text moves on, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:" This time a slightly modified description of Jesus from the first church message which changes its meaning. "These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." Note here Jesus is referred to as holding the seven spirits of God as we had listed them, and the seven messengers of the church as symbolized by the seven stars. Are we now noticing how those descriptions are preludes to the text? "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

Let's consider the city of Sardis. It is known to be the place where metallurgists first separated silver and gold, making it one of the wealthiest cities in the land. However, the city suffered an earthquake between the time of Jesus' death and the ministry of John there. The people were rather unphased by the destruction as they had wealth enough to rebuild with relative ease. It can be assumed the people there felt infallible.

This clearly shows they had not completed their deeds. Considering their wealth, it can also be understood they likely struggled with generosity. Generosity is the quality which we should understand from the message. The warning is that Jesus will come like a thief. That shows the greed we are referencing. The reward promised is to walk with Jesus, dressed in white and have their names acknowledged before God and the angels. A generous reward indeed, to be pure and walk with Jesus. The book of life is more detailed later in this exegesis. However, to touch on it, it is the book in which the names of those who have held onto goodness are written and they will receive the gift promised later in the text. Christian church, you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Stop thinking you have wealth enough of Spirit! If you have so much, be generous with it. Jesus has told you that you are not clean. You have not been dressed in white. Remember what you have seen and heard, obey it and repent!

"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:" This time a cryptic description of Jesus, "These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open." Let's try to decrypt this description. As we know, David was the king of Israel and based on lineage was a forefather of Jesus. The key of David is the control of the kingdom of Israel. We should note the many references in the Bible to the symbolism of the people of God as the land of Israel. This is often depicted as an actual city giving specifics of its walls and gates. How can we describe living in goodness and protecting ourselves from the things that go against goodness? Open doors to enter the promised land and closed doors to keep others out. "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are liars- I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the Earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

The name Philadelphia means the city of him who loves his brother. It was known as one of the most moral cities of the time. The quality we are seeing here is guidance. Jesus said He has placed before them an open door which no one can shut, and this should be taken to mean they have permission to enter the new promised kingdom. Since the people of the city are in good standing, they should continue to give guidance and in return, they are promised to be guided in order to be kept from the trial to test those who live on the Earth. He promises that all who overcome will be made pillars in the temple of God, another reference to the open door leading to the kingdom (temple) of God as opened by the key of David. Also, the promise is to have written on them Jesus' new name which we find out later is another mystery. In other words, with guidance, we can be morally upstanding. Christian church, the open door was placed before you, Jesus was the key which opened it, and you were meant to guide others to it. You have lost the way and convinced others that the door is far and wide. Return to the narrow open door and guide all others to it.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:" This time Jesus is referred to as "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Jesus is described here as the Lord over-all. "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put in your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love to rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

Compassion is the quality that resounds in this message. Laodicea was another city that was very wealthy. In fact, it was another city that suffered earthquakes regularly, however the people were rich enough to rebuild using their own money. They were on a major thoroughfare and had many great structures. The city was made up of mostly Jews. Jesus directly tells them how they act as if they have everything they

need, however He notes they are not living toward true goodness. He shows them compassion and counsels them to put their wealth in Him and gives His compassionate response should they choose to do that. He goes on to say He is standing at the door. The question is who will show Him that same compassion? He gives them the promise of the reward to sit with Him on the throne just as Jesus sits on the throne with God. Would this not be the ultimate sign of compassion? Is this not the greatest reward? Christian church, you have stopped your own progress. You act as if you have everything you need. However, you have not delivered everything God needs and therefore you are lukewarm. Fear the Lord or he will spit you out! Your compassion is internal. Buy from Jesus the gold refined in the fire so that compassion can spread to all.

It is important to note, this is the last of the seven churches, and its reward is that of completion. It is the culmination of the seven spirits and the seven qualities.

Lord- providing insight.

Knowledge- providing helpfulness.

Understanding- providing instruction.

Wisdom- providing encouragement.

Counsel- providing generosity.

Power or might- providing guidance.

Fear of the Lord- providing compassion.

This is the *understanding* we must reach! Christian church, why is this not taught? Is it your own shame holding you back? Do you think you can hide like Adam and Eve did or like Cain did? You can, and God will find you regardless. End your betrayal.

Now that we have an understanding of the church, the spirits of God, and the promises of Jesus, we can move forward with the rest of the message John gives us.

The throne

After John finishes writing the letters as were told to him addressed to the churches, he says he looked and saw a door standing open in heaven. The voice which had come to him originally, the one that he describes as being like a trumpet (warning) says to him "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." Then John states, "At once I was in the Spirit," then he goes on to describe what he sees. The statement saying, what must take place after this, gives us a clue to the timeline of the events about to unfold, meaning they happen after the time when John writes this text.

John sees before him a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. He describes them with the appearance of jasper and carnelian. Jasper is symbolic of God and Carnelian is symbolic of the fire of divine anger. John goes on to say there was a rainbow, resembling an emerald encircling the throne. A rainbow is the symbol of covenant keeping and the likeness to an emerald symbolizes life, more specifically new life. So, John is seeing God keeping His covenant of new life.

John tells us he sees twenty-four other thrones surrounding the throne of God with twenty-four elders seated on them. The elders were dressed in white with crowns of gold on their heads. This description is the source of much debate regarding who the twenty-four elders are. Does it matter? We know they wear white. We know they have been identified as elders, and we know they have crowns of gold. So, they are pure as symbolized by the white garb, they are leaders in a group which is the intended definition of elders, and they are now leaders of the kingdoms of Earth as designated by the crowns. They can be none other than those who lived in such a way as to earn the great prize of being seated in the throne with Jesus and given the rewards as we heard promised in the letters to the church. We need not care who they were on Earth, we should only respect that they are examples of the reward we should be seeking.

John then states that flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder come from the throne. This is an incredible image. But let's understand its meaning. Lightning represents light or truth at great speed and thunder represents the voice of God. So here we see that from His throne in heaven God's truth is sent out. Do we accept it?

In front of the throne John says that he sees seven lamps blazing, which he clarifies are the seven spirits of God. He also states that before the throne is what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. It means that before God's throne, there was a clear view of the multitude of people. In other words, it symbolizes that God is all seeing. In those days, it was rare to find a crystal that was clear. Most were milky in some fashion. Additionally, glass was rare. The two referenced items, crystal and glass, don't have symbolic references from the time that suit the scene here. However, the description- like a sea of glass, changes its meaning. The sea is representative of the multitude. In other words, the sea symbolizes all people. So, the purpose is to say that God is all seeing of the multitude. This means God not only sees us, our actions, but He also sees what is in us as we are part of the sea, the multitude.

Then John tells us that in the center, around the throne, were four living creatures covered in eyes front and back. He describes the first one as being like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with a face like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. He says each of them had six wings and were covered with eyes all around even under their wings. Let's pause to clarify these creatures. They will be referenced multiple times in the text, and we should understand what they are in order to understand the meanings that will follow. There was a common saying in those days: "The mightiest among the birds is the eagle. The mightiest among the domestic animals is the bull. The mightiest among the wild beasts is the lion. And the mightiest of all is man." That is not the meaning of this vision of creatures, however it does help us reach the meaning. The four creatures represent the creations God placed on Earth. The lion represents the wild beasts, the ox represents the domesticated animals, the one with a face like a man represents humans, and the eagle represents the birds of the air. However, there is still a deeper symbolism related here which is in the symbolism of each chosen creature. The lion is a symbol of strength, the ox is a symbol of patient endurance, the eagle is a symbol of hope. However, to reach the meaning of the symbolism behind the creature with the face of a man, we need to first understand that no words should be left out in our exegesis. Note this is the only creature John limits the description of to only the face. That is because the face is symbolic of the mind, or will, or character trait, therefore it is the symbol of the free will of man. So, they are strength, endurance, free will, and hope as related to all living things on the Earth. These creatures resemble what Ezekiel told us in his vision of the glory of the Lord- lion, ox, eagle, and man.

Now let's reach an understanding of the wings. Each creature has six wings. Remember we have mentioned that numbers symbolize something. Six is the number which symbolizes mankind. Wings symbolize speed, swiftness, and protection. Eyes symbolize vigilance. Therefore, going back to the book of Genesis it is stated that man is placed on the Earth to care for all the living things on it. Does this make sense now? We are intended to protect and care for all things on the Earth including our free will and each other's free will with constant vigilance. Another number reference here is that there are four creatures. The number four symbolizes Earth. Another supporting detail to show us that the creatures represent the creatures of the Earth.

John goes on to give us an action that occurs. "Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" John tells us whenever the creatures give glory, honor, and thanks, to God, the twenty-four elders fall down before God and worship Him. They lay their crowns down before His throne and say, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Here is the explanation of this strange occurrence. Now that we understand the creatures represent all living things, it is clear that if the living things of Earth give praise to God, the elders in heaven seated with Him congratulate Him recognizing His goodness resounding back from the creatures of the Earth. When the creatures of the Earth show their goodness and praise God for it, there must be a similar feeling in heaven. A reassurance to those elders that goodness has not completely left the Earth.

John's attention now turns to God seated on the throne and he sees a scroll in God's right hand with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. Then John sees a mighty angel who proclaims in a loud voice "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But as John states, no one in heaven or on Earth or under the Earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. John says he wept when he realized no one was found worthy to open it. A side note here, in those days, only the proper person with a witness was allowed to break the seal on any sealed scroll. The people of that time would have understood this depiction easier than it is for us today. Think of it this way, if we send an important item through the mail and we require confirmation of receipt, the person receiving the mail must sign for it to the witness of the person delivering it. This is the same concept. Only the person it was intended for could open it.

One of the elders, seeing John weep says to him, “Do not weep! See, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” This one seems obvious but in due diligence, this is saying that Jesus has now overcome His trial on Earth and has been found worthy to open the scroll.

Then John sees a lamb, looking as if it had been slain standing in the center of the throne encircled by the four creatures and the twenty-four elders. He calls the lamb “He” as he says, “He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the Earth.” Ok, let’s break this down. The lamb represents Jesus after His crucifixion. The Lamb is the symbol used for Jesus throughout the texts of the Bible. The seven eyes we are told represent the seven spirits of God. Sometimes John has to include in his text the intended symbolism as eyes were not known as the symbol of the spirits of God. Eyes represent vigilance, and perhaps the intention here is to understand that Jesus is vigilant of the seven spirits of God. The horns are symbolic of a means to send a message. The people would use horns to send messages out to the community, to sound an alarm, or to call for something. Therefore, the seven horns are the sending method of the vigilance of the seven spirits.

John tells us the Lamb came and took the scroll from the right hand of God sitting on the throne. When He did, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. He tells us each one had a harp, and they were holding bowls full of incense, which John tells us are the prayers of the saints. Then John tells us the song they sang: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the Earth.” There isn’t much symbolism in this part of the text. The harp is simply symbolic of musical praise, and John has clarified for us that the bowls of incense symbolize the prayers of the saints. The song praises Jesus for His ability to overcome His trial on Earth. They praise that Jesus was able to start a movement which would bring people from all over the Earth to the truth of God as goodness and foreshadow the upcoming promise of goodness reigning on Earth.

Then John heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. He says, as they sang, they encircled the throne and the creatures and the thrones of the twenty-four elders and the song they

sang was: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Knowing there is symbolism in numbers, we should not let numbers evade our exegesis. In this case the number is thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. There is no hidden symbolism here, it is simply stating a great number of angels. The song is a song of praise but also of submission to Jesus as they deem Him worthy to receive everything.

Then John heard every creature in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth and on the sea and all that is in the sea singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” Then the four living creatures said “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshipped. This is to show that all beings when enlightened to the truth of the mystery, will send praise to God and Jesus. We should note the phases of this, the first to praise Him were the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, then the host of angels, then all beings everywhere. We’ll see this play out as the story progresses. Lastly, the four living creatures say “Amen”. Amen is a declaration of affirmation. So, if the four living creatures who represent all living creatures on Earth declare their affirmation, then God and Jesus have achieved their goal. Understand.

The seven seals

John's text moves on to the opening of the first seal. He states he watched as the Lamb opened the first seal. Then one of the four living creatures said in a voice like thunder, "Come!" John looked and saw a white horse whose rider had a bow and was given a crown, and who rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

Before we go any further into the opening of the seals, we should clarify a point here. After the great flood when Noah built the ark and God wiped the Earth clean, God made a promise that He would no longer bring destruction on the Earth. He would leave it to mankind to pass judgement on each other, and He would no longer bring destruction down on Earth Himself. Of course, there is a clause in this promise. Jesus is the Son of Man, and Jesus is the judge of man's actions in life. Jesus has been given authority to pass judgement, and who better than someone who has done no wrong against others and who was put to death by people for it. Now that Jesus has been crucified and risen to His place of power, He can rule over the Earth and pass judgement as He sees fit.

At the opening of the first seal, a white horse with a rider bent on conquest appears. So, we have a horse symbolizing strength and power, that is white symbolizing pure. He carries a bow symbolizing God's word as a weapon against evil, and he is sent out to conquer. This should not be something we fear if we are not evil. This is pure strength armed against evil and sent to conquer it.

When the second seal opens the second living creature tells John "Come!" and another horse appears, fiery red whose rider was given the power to take peace from the Earth and make men slay each other. The rider was given a large sword. In this one, the fiery red horse symbolizes destruction and war. Seems fitting as he has the power to take peace and make people kill each other. The sword in this message symbolizes bloodshed. Realizing there was war prior to the death of Jesus on Earth, how should we interpret this seals' opening after the death of Jesus? Haven't the horrors of wars in recent history far exceeded those from antiquity? In the old days, armies lined up for battle, and they could see their enemy approaching. In our time, wars are fought from a distance with secret weapons and without warning. War also extends now beyond the traditional definition. Men kill each other daily. In fact, there is a homicide that occurs on Earth every minute. We war in ways previously unimagined.

When the third seal opens, the third living creature tells John "Come!" there was a black horse whose rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then John heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" This black horse is symbolic of the power of moral darkness. The scales the rider holds represent fairness but only in the physical sense of fairness. The four living creatures give us the rest of the meaning here. As they talk about daily wages, paying in wheat and barley, but protecting the expensive oil and wine. We can understand this as greed. In today's time it is better stated as money, however at that time, money was in its early stages. We can certainly see how this has worsened since the death of Jesus.

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, the fourth living creature said to John "Come!" this time a pale horse appeared and its rider was named death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the Earth to kill by sword, famine, plague, and the wild beasts of the Earth. The pale horse is symbolic of the power of death. The rider being named death is a straight-forward explanation of this. Hades is representative of a disembodied existence. This is to say that people would suffer death from many different sources, and not only would they suffer death, but they would have to wait in a disembodied existence until the resurrection and trial. (We haven't gotten to that yet, but it is alluded to here.)

Let's pause here again for some deeper *understanding*. Each time a seal was opened, one of the living creatures would tell John "Come!". The first living creature was a lion symbolic of strength. We can see this coincides with the rider bent on conquest, strength. The second creature was an ox symbolic of patient endurance, and coinciding with the second rider who takes peace, forcing us to endure the hardships of war. The third creature was the face of man, symbolic of free will and coinciding with the third rider bringing greed. What plays a larger role in greed than free will? The fourth creature was an eagle symbolic of hope coinciding with the fourth rider, death followed by a disembodied existence. Yet we must have hope in the resurrection. So, we can understand why the creatures had involvement here. It is the creatures of the Earth who would have to succumb to these riders, but we are also given here the message of how to overcome them through strength, endurance, free will, and hope.

The fifth seal moves away from the riders. When the Lamb opened the fifth seal John saw under the altar, the souls of those who had been killed due to the word of God and the testimony they maintained. Understand that many were killed in those days for their belief in God and their teachings of God and Jesus. The souls called out in a loud voice, “How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the Earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were killed, as they had been, was completed. We should note a couple of things here. Since these souls were killed for their belief and testimony, they were spared from the disembodied existence, however they were made to wait under the altar in heaven until enough people had been killed for their testimony. However, the white robes they were given show that they were rewarded with purity.

John watched as the sixth seal was opened and there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to Earth like overripe figs falling from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the Earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of Jesus. They say, “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” This is quite visual. However, like in the rest of the text, we must take another look from a different perspective. John is not writing a movie script. There is meaning in this vision. An earthquake is symbolic of great sudden change. The darkening of the sun is symbolic of the dark side of human nature. The moon turning red symbolizes the light of the church becoming sinful, since the moon symbolizes the church. Stars were known as angels, however a star fallen to Earth is considered to be a fallen angel. The sky is symbolic of heavenly wisdom and, in this message, that heavenly wisdom is rolled up like a scroll. Mountains are symbolic of political power, and islands are symbolic of solitude, therefore political powers were removed from their place and solitude was no longer in a place of solitude. Have these things come to pass since the death of Jesus, great sudden change, the emerging of the dark side of human nature, the church becoming sinful, fallen angels spreading a message of wickedness on Earth, heavenly wisdom removed, political powers displaced, and solitude lost? Yes, to all. People, when we realize the

reality of our world, do search for a place to hide from it all. Yet as the old saying goes be careful what you ask for… They called to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from God and Jesus' wrath. Perhaps they will get what they ask for.

John says, after he witnesses the events from the sixth seal, he saw four angels standing at the four corners of the Earth holding back the four winds to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or the sea or any tree. Then he saw a fifth angel from the east having the seal of the living God. That angel called out in a loud voice to the other four who had been given power to harm the land and sea, "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then John goes on to say he heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. Then he gives the breakdown showing 12,000 from each, Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Let's break this down some since this is a message stuck in the text in between the sixth seal and the seventh. Yet it is something to be considered. Note the sixth seal caused a great change and opened the door for darkness. Yet these angels were put in place to hold back the winds, which are symbolic of destruction and desolation. They were told to wait until the 144,000 had the seals on their foreheads. The fifth angel who delivered this message to them was unlike them as it had the seal on it already. John writes the breakdown of the 144,000, but we should note the list begins exactly as follows: "From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed," Then the list goes on. Notice how John says they were sealed meaning it was done at that time.

After the sealing of the 144,000 John saw a great multitude that no one could count from every tribe, nation, people, and language wearing white robes and carrying palm branches. They were standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." To this, the angels, who gathered around the throne earlier, along with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, fell down on their faces before the throne worshipping God saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then John says that one of the elders asked him "These in white robes- who are they, and where did they come from?" John replied with "Sir, you know." A much more insightful reply

than we likely would have given. Ours would likely have been "Uh, I don't know." John truly did have insight. The elder said "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again with they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Ok, here we have another strange interlude, so to speak. The multitude we now know are those who came out of the great tribulation. An entire book could be written covering the many interpretations of the great tribulation. People have taken timeframes from different books in the Bible and tried to determine the length of the great tribulation and the exact time of it on the timeline of life on Earth. What do you people hope to gain from this? What insight? Are you hoping it has already passed? Are you hoping it will be after your time? What does great tribulation mean? Our exegesis need be nothing more than they are those who came out of a great struggle, who purified themselves with the forgiveness of their sins, meaning they repented of their actions. The multitude is carrying palm branches which are symbolic of victory. They cry out "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." Meaning they were delivered from harm. What reason do we have to assume we are not in the great tribulation now? Furthermore, could we not call our physical life on this Earth the great tribulation regardless of when we lived?

After the death of Jesus, He is able to open the seals on the scroll. He has opened six to this point in the story, the sixth one causing great change, and then the 144,000 were sealed and we are waiting for Jesus to open the seventh seal as we meet this multitude which is praising their deliverance from harm. We know that the scene John saw was evolving. It started with the seven lampstands, added the throne, then the twenty-four elders, then the four living creatures, then the multitude of angels, then the souls under the altar, and now the multitude of those from the tribulation. Do we see a growing number in heaven? The point is, it does not matter when this multitude came from. What matters is that we are told if we repent and accept the forgiveness of our sins, we too can join the multitude and receive the reward of never being hungry,

never being thirsty, never being burned, and under the tent of God. The great tribulation can simply be the patient endurance of our lives on this Earth regardless of when we lived.

Then John tells us that when the seventh seal is opened, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. We also have a custom of taking a moment of silence for certain things. Typically, this is reserved as a moment of silence in reflection of an event which causes sadness. The seventh seal has been opened and heaven, rather than rejoicing, takes a moment of silence. We can understand this to mean that the opening of the seventh seal was not something to be celebrated. John says he saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were each given a trumpet. An eighth angel who had a golden censer came and stood at the altar. Let's understand the seven angels who stand before God are the messengers of the seven spirits of God. Also, for the purpose of understanding, a golden censer is an item in which certain things were burned creating smoke to give as an offering at an altar. It goes on to state that the angel was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense together with the prayers of the saints went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the Earth causing peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. This is the end of burnt offerings on Earth. The censer for the offerings has now been cast down to Earth causing (in our exegesis, knowing the symbolism) the voice of God's truth delivered at great speed and causing great change. Then the seven angels with the trumpets began to sound them.

The seven trumpets

When the first angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is Lord, sounded his trumpet, there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the Earth. A third of the Earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up and all the green grass was burned up. This is to show the Lord has the power and authority and influence to destroy by fire. The hail and fire are symbolic of divine vengeance in the presence of God, mixed with blood means for purification. In other words, this trumpet begins a process of purifying the Earth through divine vengeance in the presence of God. We can see how this is showing the power of the Lord, the first of the spirits of God. Do we use our power from the Lord to protect and preserve the Earth, or do we use that power to destroy it?

The second angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is knowledge, sounded his trumpet and something like a mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned to blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The mountain all ablaze represents political power in the presence of God. We see here that is thrown into the sea. Meaning politics and God would no longer be joined causing great loss to the oceans. In all our history of searching the oceans for knowledge, haven't our political leaders ruined the oceans, losing their connection to goodness in the process? What knowledge did we gain toward goodness from this? Perhaps our quest for knowledge should have remained internal rather than spanning the oceans. But everything to God's plan.

When the third angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is *understanding,* sounded his trumpet, a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. John tells us the name of the star is wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the bitter water. Let's revisit some of the symbolism we already know, a star is an angel or messenger, blazing like a torch symbolizes in the presence of God. So why then would a messenger of God make the waters bitter? We must relate this to the spirit of *understanding*. Note that the angel in the presence of God falls. Therefore, it is now a fallen angel and causes bitterness. Also let's identify what the meaning of wormwood is. It is simply symbolic of bitterness, however if we break it down, a worm is symbolic of guilt and wood is symbolic of change as wood is easily reshaped. Therefore, the bitterness

comes with the change which is tied to guilt. Our waters are bitter, and we still lack *understanding*.

The fourth angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is wisdom, sounded his trumpet and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day and a third of the night were without light. This time there is no vessel described for what strikes these things. If we don't have the understanding of the angel being that of wisdom, then we miss the meaning. Light is the symbol of wisdom. In our time, we have much knowledge, however we can attest that wisdom is sparce. In our physical world, the sun is darkened by our towering buildings, our smog covered cities, and our blackout curtains. The moon and stars have lost their glow in and around our cities as our lights blot them out. We grow darker and lose more wisdom. Do we not have the wisdom to see this?

Before the sounding of the fifth trumpet, John heard an eagle that was flying in midair calling out in a loud voice "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the Earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels." Many people refer to this as the three woes. We'll discover them as we go. The use of the eagle symbolizes swiftness but also deliverance. In other words, the woes will be swift but if we heed the warning, there is deliverance from them.

Now the fifth angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is counsel, sounded his trumpet. John saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the Earth, and it was given the key to the shaft of the abyss. We should take a moment here to discuss this abyss. We already know that a star fallen to the Earth is a fallen angel with a message of wickedness. So, we know that this abyss is opened by wickedness. This abyss will be referenced again and so in order to assist in our exegesis, although the abyss has not been fully revealed to us yet, it is the abyss which houses the beast we will meet later. John tells us that when the fallen angel opens the abyss, smoke rises out of it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. Smoke is symbolic of sin. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the Earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the Earth. Locusts are symbolic of the death and destruction of what makes life good. The mention of having the power of the scorpions of the Earth, means that the scorpions are not a symbol here, but the

connotation is that the locusts, which only harm the vegetation, have the power to also harm people. However, they were told not to harm the grass or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, only to torture them for five months. John describes the agony they suffered like that of the sting of a scorpion to man. He says during those days men will seek death but not find it, they will want to die but death will elude them. The five months is symbolic of restitution or fairness. Like the sting from a scorpion over a period of time, the pain recedes, and our wound heals.

John goes on to give a physical description of the locusts. They looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lion's teeth. They had breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails, they had the power to torment people for five months. He also says they had as king over them, the angel of the abyss whose name is Abaddon or destroyer.

Breaking this down, horses prepared for battle are symbolically as it sounds, strength in warfare. Something like crowns of gold on their heads means they were in some leadership role, and the face resembling human faces means they had some sense of human free will in them. Their hair, like women's hair, is symbolic of wealth and power. Teeth are symbolic of weapons and being lions' teeth means they have weapons of strength. The breastplate of iron means they also had physical power. The sound from their wings shows they have swift powerful movement. Their tails are a key to our exegesis, as the tail is symbolic of the teaching of painful lies. So now we know these locusts are strong in warfare, leaders, with some free will, wealth and power, having weapons of power, physical power, swift movement, and spread painful lies…. Sound like anything familiar? This is when we go back and consider the spirit of counsel or advice given from consultation. Do we see now? Our leaders counsel us, yet don't they often counsel us with lies while holding great power over us? Once we complain to our leaders, after five months or so, don't they give us restitution only to sting us again? Yet if we follow God's counsel and we have the seal of God on us, then we won't be hurt by them. In today's society, are any of us unharmed by our leaders? Do any of us have the seal of God on us?

One more question to pose here is related to the timeline once again. Of course, there were leaders before Jesus and during His time who lied and hurt the people, however in the story of the Bible we read about many great leaders who lead with God's purpose. Since the time of Jesus has there been another leader who clearly had God as his purpose, whose intentions were only for goodness and loving each other one and all? These leaders emerge from the abyss, the same abyss the beast will come from, and will be later sent to. The understanding of that beast is to come later in the text.

John writes, this was the first woe, two other woes are yet to come.

The sixth angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is power and might, sounded his trumpet and John heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. Note that in this case, horns have a different symbolism. They are not the horns that we would find on an animal, this is the horn that symbolizes a projection, like the one which gives warning. The voice tells the sixth angel: "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour, day, month, and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops that John heard was two hundred million. The Euphrates River was known to keep back invaders from the people of the area during those times. The angels bound there are representative of the holding back of military powers. The number two-hundred million is explained as such, two is the number symbolic of witness, but it is also the number symbolic of division, and the hundred million simply translates to "many". Therefore, the number of troops is many who were divided.

John goes on to describe the horses and riders as having breastplates which were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths come fire, smoke, and sulfur. John says a third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails, because their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. Let's dissect the breastplates first. A breastplate is intended for protection, these are identified as being fiery red, symbolic of destruction and war, dark blue, symbolic of authority, and yellow as sulfur symbolic of the wrath of God's love. The heads of the horses resemble lions symbolizing

strength, and from their mouths comes fire, symbolizing God's presence, but it is coupled with smoke symbolic of sin, and sulfur symbolic of wrath. So, from their mouths we get the wrath of God for sin, but their tails complete the understanding. The tail is symbolic of teaching lies, and the snake is symbolic of deceitful evil, having heads which are symbolic of rulers that inflict injury. Do we now see the meaning? These horses and riders were released from the river which used to hold them back, led by rulers under the false pretense to be of God, killing a third of mankind.

John goes on to tell us the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands. They did not stop worshipping demons, idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood- idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, magic arts, sexual immorality or thefts. Going back to the angel representing the spirit of power and might, we can see how the people were using their power and might against each other and those who weren't using it against each other, were using it for purposes other than for goodness and love of others which it was intended for. Where do we focus our power and might, and where do we draw it from?

Before the seventh trumpet, John gives us a couple of strange stories. He says he saw a mighty angel coming down from heaven, who was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head. His face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. First, let's note this angel is not fallen! The description of it tells us this. Being robed in a cloud is symbolic of being alive as an angel. The rainbow over its head is symbolic of hope, and his face like the sun means he has the will of Jesus' light. His legs being fiery pillars symbolizes he stands firmly in God. So, we know this angel is on the side of goodness and not a fallen angel. John says the angel had a little scroll laying open in his hand. The angel planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. The addition of the description- little, to the scroll tells us that it is not the scroll Jesus opened. His right foot being on the sea represents conscious power over the sea, and his left foot being on the land represents unconscious power over the uninhabited land, showing that his focus is on people and their interaction with the uninhabited land. His shout, like the roar of the lion, is symbolic of a wicked ruling. Sounds odd coming from an angel we know to be of goodness. When he roared, the voices of the seven thunders spoke, but as John was about to write what they said, he heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven

thunders have said and do not write it down." The seven thunders are the voice of the seven spirits of God. Remember here that the last angel we encountered with the trumpet was the sixth one of power and might, we are seeing that carried over into this vision, yet then we are left with a purposeful mystery. Perhaps we need more of the story to finish our exegesis of it.

John says the angel standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and he swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the Earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets." So, the angel consciously (as symbolized by his right hand) swore by God. But the interesting thing here is that John doesn't say he swore by God, he gives the description of God as the creator of all things. The statement he makes starts with "There will be no more delay!" this is to say that the events unfolding, are now happening at a constant pace with no delay in between. However, he says "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet…" We have already heard the sixth angel's trumpet, and we've been told there will be no more delay, but we are hearing about days to come later with the seventh trumpet, again showing that the events are unfolding constantly now. Consider all of the seals, and the six trumpets so far, have they not revealed to us the failings of man over the course of our history? Have they not shown to worsen after the death of Jesus? Then he says, "the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets." But in order to understand this statement, we must first read the rest of this vision.

John then heard the voice from heaven again "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So, John went to the angel and asked the angel to give him the scroll. The angel told him "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." John says he took the scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It was sweet as honey in his mouth, but when he had eaten it, it turned his stomach sour and then he was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."

The angel is representative of ruling over the sea and the land. However, he gives a roar, warning of wicked ruling. Think about our history and the time when mankind

became capable of efficiently traversing the vastness of the oceans. This occurs after the death of Jesus and therefore fits this moment in the timeline. We did conquer the oceans and in so doing conquered new lands. However, if this was explained to John and he wrote a warning to us telling us not to traverse the seas, then Christianity would not have reached the America's. Therefore, John was told not to write it. Then John eats the scroll which tastes sweet. Wasn't it sweet when we escaped the rule of the kings and formed a new land in freedom? Yes, it was sweet, however it turned sour. Mankind had not learned the lessons and those seals and trumpets which had sounded up to this point, resounded and we conquered the native people of many lands in horrible ways. It seems this was a necessary step in order to fulfill prophesies. John is told he will have to prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings. In this exegesis, we will see how the rest of the text is just that. We should now understand that we are the ones intended to receive the prophecy written. Pay attention, the *understanding* of this vision is a verified truth that warns us.

Still before the seventh trumpet sounds, John tells us another strange story. He says he was given a measuring rod and was told "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court. Do not measure it, because it has been given to the gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." One thing at a time here. When John is told to measure the temple, and the altar, and to count the worshipers, he is being asked to figuratively examine God's gathering to that point in time. This simply means to make note of what stage of growth it has. Similar to how we measure our children's height, perhaps marking it on a doorway in our house. It is a moment of insight into the current state of things with the expectation it would increase. However, the subsequent statement to disregard the outer court gives us a grim outlook of the future growth of God's gathering.

It says the Gentiles will trample the city for 42 months. Again, a topic of much debate as people try to uncover the mysteries here. Six is the number symbolic of man, seven being the number symbolic of perfection, six times seven is forty-two. 42 months is symbolic of the perfect amount of time for mankind. Then it tells of God's two witnesses, who will prophesy for 1,260 days. The number two seen here is different than the last time we looked at it. Here it represents validity. In those times it took

two to verify a statement. In order to witness, there must be two witnesses. God's witness, after the death of Jesus, is the church spreading the word of God and the story of Jesus through the biblical texts. We are even given a clue to this answer in the text, being described as the two olive trees and the lampstands, however these lampstands are not before God, they are before the Lord of the Earth. In other words, our church on Earth is not part of the lampstands representing the church in heaven. This has also been interpreted as the Old and New Testament of the Bible. We can accept that interpretation as there is division between the Old Testament and the New, in that the Old Testament is the old covenant, and the New Testament is the new covenant in Jesus thereby giving two witnesses to the accounts. The 1,260 days is simply the number of days as related to the 42 months, thirty days per month. The difference is the two witnesses (the Bible) must endure and therefore as in any struggle in life, we view the time from a lesser vantage point. Therefore, it is stated as days. Lastly, clothed in sackcloth simply means living humbly. What is humbler than the Bible?

The story goes on to say, regarding the two witnesses, if anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have the power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying. And they have the power to turn waters into blood and to strike the Earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. So, if anyone wants to hurt them, fire, which we know as the presence of God, comes from their mouths which we know is simply statement, and it devours them. How many have tried to hurt the Bible only to be stopped by its own words? Rain symbolizes change, and so we are told that the Bible has the ability to resist change. Turning water to blood symbolizes bringing people to life. The last threat, being that of plagues, simply means that if needed, the Bible will defend its existence to extremes. Then the story turns grim.

When the witnesses (the Bible) have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language, and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the Earth will gloat over them and celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the Earth. Here we have another

reference to the abyss. Again, we have not been shown this vision yet. So, the exegesis of it is difficult to give and we will learn more later, but the abyss which was opened with the fifth trumpet is the abyss this beast will come from. The great city which is referenced is said to be figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified. Understand these people referred to cultures as cities as well. The intonation here is that it is the mass gathering of people. These in particular are in reference to cities known to be against God. Our society in general is the great city. It is the city of mankind, absent of God. Note here the description of the people is the exact description of the people John was told he would have to prophecy to again, every people, tribe, language, and nation. Three and a half days are symbolic of resurrection as the number three is the symbol of resurrection, but this is not the full resurrection, as symbolized by half. Then in good fashion, hope breaks through.

After the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered the two witnesses, and they stood on their feet. Terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies looked on. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The breath of God is as it sounds, giving them life, and the standing on their feet is symbolic of them coming to power through action. Just like the angel that came down in a cloud, these witnesses go up in a cloud symbolizing they are alive as angels. So, after being discarded by the people, the Bible gains life, power through action, and is resurrected angelically (remembering that angels are messengers). Afterwards a great earthquake symbolic of great change, causing the destruction of a tenth of the city. A tenth is the amount that the people of the Old Testament should give to God from their belongings as an offering. The city is symbolic of mankind absent of God. Therefore, the perfect number of people were killed represented as 7,000. Seven meaning perfect and thousand meaning many. The survivors, finally, after all this destruction reach the seventh spirit, fear of the Lord.

John says the second woe has passed and the third woe is coming soon.

Now the seventh angel, who is representative of the spirit of God which is fear of the Lord, sounds his trumpet and unlike the seventh seal when there was a moment

of silence in heaven, this time there are loud voices in heaven saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God saying "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great- and for destroying those who destroy the Earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of His covenant was seen in it. There came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The voices in heaven are celebrating! Finally, the people of Earth realized the truth and opened their eyes to the fear of the Lord. We see how the seventh angel was not allowed to blow their horn until that spirit of God was realized. Perhaps over the course of our relationship with God He's decided nothing He does gets us to this fear of the Lord, and it will take us destroying ourselves and destroying God's witnesses in order to finally see the path to goodness. Then we see the temple open, and the ark of the covenant in it. Interesting how the path to goodness was given to us so long ago, yet we broke the covenant constantly and only now was it a true covenant- meaning agreement. This realization of the covenant, recognition of God, and submittal by the people is represented in the description. The lightning being truth, the thunder being the voice of God, the earthquake being great change, and the hailstorm symbolic of divine judgement. As the twenty-four elders said, the time for judgement had come.

So far, we have seen truths beginning to be revealed to us. In fact, that last story leading to the sounding of the seventh trumpet was an ending was it not? It reached the time of judgement. However, the purpose of our lives cannot be simply to endure struggle. All of this must be for a higher purpose. We have seen how the seals enlighten us to our natural instincts which drive us from goodness. We have seen how the trumpets enlighten us to the problems we cause because of those instincts. We have been given instructions on how to persevere. However, we have not been given the answer to why we are here and what we are expected to do. The text of Revelation must shift at this point to teach us what we struggle against, why we are here, and what is expected of us in the end. As we look into it, we must understand the timeline. Just know

that the forty-two months is where we are at the time of this writing. Everything prior to that, we have already explained, is in motion or has happened. However, it is not the time of judgement today. If it were, clearly, this writing would not exist as the end of days would have come. The next part of the text goes out of sequence in the timeline.

The breaking out of sin

John now tells us about a great and wondrous sign that appeared in heaven. He saw a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. This woman (by the way, woman is symbolic of the church) clothed with the sun, meaning alive with the truth of Jesus' light and with the moon under her feet meaning she stood on God's word, had a crown, meaning she was shown as a leader, which had twelve stars meaning the message of the kingdom of heaven. So, she was with God's truth, carrying a message from heaven. Being that she was pregnant we can assume that child is what she carried as the message from heaven.

Then John saw another sign in heaven, an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. It's not hard to determine an enormous red dragon is Satan. Red symbolizing sin and the dragon symbolizing Satan himself. The seven heads represent the completeness in the minds of kings. The ten horns represent the responsibility of the kings. And the seven crowns on the heads represent the completeness of the minds of the kings to rule. Do we see how this vision of Satan is bent on ruling the people? John tells us his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to Earth. This is to say his lies (remember the tail symbolizes lies) caused a third of the angels (stars) to become fallen angels. Some of us may have heard before that Satan was cast out of heaven and brought a host of angels with him. It is known as the uprising in heaven and is a battle we are about to discover. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that he could devour her child as soon as it was born. She gave birth to a boy who will rule all nations with an iron scepter. In other words, we know this to be a description of Jesus. Her child was snatched up to God and to His throne. The woman fled to the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. It seems Satan was not able to get ahold of Jesus at His arrival in heaven. Understanding that after Jesus died and went to heaven, the two witnesses were put in place (again that being the Bible) and they were in place for 1,260 days, we can see how the timeline although still not specific as to what year, remains the same. The perfect amount of time for mankind.

John then says there was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But the dragon and his angels

were not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down. At this point, John does us a favor and calls the dragon by name "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." He was hurled to the Earth and his angels with him. Then John heard a loud voice in heaven saying: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Let's pause for a moment of reflection here. So, we have this dragon or let's go ahead and call him Satan. He was in heaven, and we know he had discord with the angels there. Imagine the world before Jesus, think about the stories of the Old Testament. Something was about to change. This image of Satan is bent on ruling mankind. His focus is not on goodness. He does not fit in with the host of good angels and God. He is rejected due to his evil ways, and the host of heaven forces him, and any who follow him, because of his lies, out of heaven. They won their victory over evil. But now evil has come to the Earth at the same time Jesus did. In the stories of the New Testament, we read about how the devil himself tempted Jesus. The devil was attempting to convert Jesus to his side of the battle, hoping to mount a comeback.

John then tells us that when the dragon realized he had been hurled down to Earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert where she would be taken care of for a time, times, and a half a time out of the serpent's reach. Ok more symbolism which people have really lost over time. The two wings of a great eagle represent assistance allowing her to rapidly reach her destination thereby giving her deliverance from the serpent. Time, times, and a half a time is similar to the 1,260-day reference back to the life of the Bible, three being the number symbolic of the resurrection and the half being not complete. This correlates to the three and a half days until the resurrection of the Bible. In other words, this woman who is representative of the true church of Jesus would have to hide until the Bible was revered again. Consider the time- as being the history of mankind prior to

and during Jesus' life, then consider the times- being those from Jesus' death until the present (which we will investigate further later), and a half a time- which is yet to come but will be cut short.

Then the serpent spewed water like a river from its mouth to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the Earth opened up its mouth to swallow the river. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. Again, nothing we read in this text is a movie script. The dragon spewing water like a river is symbolic of Satan sending people who are God's enemies to overtake her. The Earth opening its mouth to swallow it, is symbolic to say that the Earth is intended for goodness and will not allow wickedness to prevail. The dragon standing on the shore of the sea is to symbolize that Satan now stood in front of all mankind.

Then John saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head, he had a blasphemous name. The beast John saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like a bear, and a mouth like a lion. Here is the symbolism. It came out of the sea, meaning it came out of the people themselves. The ten horns are again the responsibility of the kings, the seven heads are again the completeness in the minds of kings, however differing from Satan, these crowns are on the horns not the heads, meaning they believe their responsibility is to rule over the people. The blasphemous names on the heads are symbolic that the minds of the rulers were against God. The leopard symbolizes it is fast, the feet like a bear symbolize it is standing in power, and the mouth like a lion means it speaks with strength.

John tells us the dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshipped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" Let's consider the one head that had the fatal wound. One is the number of the truth about God. That had been fatally wounded but healed. So, the mind of the beast knew the truth about God but would not accept it. Since the beast came from the sea,

representing mankind, can we not see that we have the truth about God and do not accept it?

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. Again, this relates back to our timeline, therefore this beast is born of man at the time of Jesus. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander God's name and His dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. He was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. Here is another reference to those who John was told to prophesy to again. All inhabitants of the Earth will worship the beast- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. John says "He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed." And John tells us; this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. This is the most important part of the message. John is telling us everyone will worship the beast. The only exception is those whose name is written in the book of life. However, the description used for the book says it belongs to the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world and Jesus was not killed at the time of creation. The exegesis of this is that Jesus was killed by man. It was not Satan who killed Him, it was the people of the world. Did Satan have influence? Surely, but the plan in place is one of great wonder. The creation of the world allowed those in heaven to cast down the devil. The world and the people in it were a trap of sorts. Jesus was slain from the creation of the world. It just didn't happen at the time of creation. You will understand this better later.

Then John saw another beast coming out of the Earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. This beast coming out of the Earth represents that it comes from our natural instincts which we have previously discussed. The two horns like a lamb symbolizes that the beast had two witnesses like Jesus, however this beast speaks like a dragon meaning its message comes from Satan. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf and made the Earth, and its inhabitants, worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. In other words, he also had authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. Notice he makes, not only the inhabitants of the Earth worship the first beast, but the Earth itself. Again, described as having the fatal wound which healed representing- knowing the truth about God

but not accepting it. John says the beast performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to Earth in full view of men. Recognizing that fire is symbolic of the presence of God, this beast is calling that presence of God down to Earth from heaven. But don't forget, this beast speaks on behalf of Satan, surely, we know this is a deceitful strategy. John verifies that by saying, because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that it could speak and all who refused to worship the image to be killed. So, what is this image which the beast has ordered to be set up?

Considering the beast out of the sea represented the desire of the kings to rule over the people, those kings now had a voice and any who refused to worship it were to be killed. What gives our leaders complete power over us? Money. Let's read more, the beast from the Earth forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. The symbolism of the mark on the right hand means people have the symbol consciously. The mark on the forehead means people will have it on their minds. Do we not have money on our minds and consciously devote most of our time to obtaining that money? John says, "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666." Ok, using the wisdom we have gained from symbolism and the insight into ourselves as John has instructed us, the number 666 is simple to interpret. It is the repetition of man. Three is the symbol of the resurrection, but in this case, using our insight, we know money does not lead to the resurrection, therefore the number six-six-six is simply the repetition of man to put money and the power we give it at the forefront in our lives rather than the goodness and love for each other that we should put first. There is another reference to the number 666 which we discussed previously. Solomon who, as we discovered, was David's son and became the king of Israel after David, was a man known for his wisdom, and his wealth. It was said that the weight of gold he received annually was 666 talents. This gives evidence of our exegesis as it relates to money. But more so, we should understand six, six, six as the repetition of mankind to act in human ways, rather than the ways of the Spirit which God has told us to pursue. We must understand and move past six onto seven.

What should we take from these images of the dragon that is Satan, the beast from the sea that desires to rule over people, and the beast from the Earth that forces us to devote ourselves to our money? We came into this section of the text hoping to find the answers to why we are here. Instead, we find out that Satan was cast down to Earth. We find out that Satan deceives us. We find out that we are deceived, and in this way, we are the cause of our own grief, our own evil. Our purpose here can't be to eliminate goodness and only worship evil, can it? Let's read further and see if we are enlightened to any answers here. It seems the answer to our question of why we are here has not yet been revealed.

John says he looked, and he saw the Lamb standing on mount Zion with the 144,000 who had the names of Jesus and God written on their foreheads. Then he heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound was like that of harpists playing their harps. It should go without saying at this point in our exegesis that the Lamb is Jesus. We've already learned about the 144,000. The sound being like the roar of rushing water symbolizes the water of life in Jesus, and the loud peal of thunder symbolizes God's word. Let's see why the harpists are playing. John says they sang a new song before the throne, and the four living creatures, and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the Earth. He says they are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths, they are blameless. This completes the image. We have Jesus standing on mount Zion which is the symbolic place of the final battle between good and evil. We have the 144,000 who are pure and are singing a secret song in heaven. Jesus is now staged for the final battle with His army at His side.

Then John says he saw another angel flying in midair who had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth- to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the Earth, the sea, and the springs of water." Here we see a messenger who has the eternal message of Jesus for the people of Earth who John was told he would have to prophecy to again. The angel gives warning to fear God, as we discovered in the spirits of God as fear of the Lord. Then we are told to worship God. If we have truly learned fear of the Lord, it is not

hard to worship the goodness of God and as the text states, learn the eternal message of Jesus. Is that what we are doing here in this writing, or will it continue to be ignored? *Understand*.

A second angel followed and said "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." There are a few occasions in the text, this being another, that refer to something we have not read yet. This angel is speaking of the fall of the nations. We'll learn more in a bit.

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." In this message, the wine of God's fury is symbolic of the true doctrine, knowledge, wisdom, instruction, and truth. It makes sense that when our eyes are opened to the way we have let Satan into our lives, we feel great sorrow for the way we have acted. The rising smoke is symbolic of our unceasing sin. It is another warning and one that must be listened to. John says this calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Let's recap this section, we have Jesus, and His army staged for battle. We have three angels delivering a message of warning to us. So, does this answer our question of why we are here? What is our purpose? John says it calls for patient endurance. So, should we just patiently endure until the time comes? We have been given a few notes toward our question here. That is, we must hear the truth of Jesus' eternal message, we must discover how the fall of Babylon occurs, and we must patiently endure, resisting the mark of the beast. John goes on to say he heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." In other words, at this point in the timeline, any of us who die with the truth of God will be blessed for having to endure such hardships and for patiently enduring them. We have some of the mission revealed to us, but we need more.

The reaping

John now tells us a vision. He saw a white cloud with one like a Son of Man seated on it. He had a crown of gold on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. In our exegesis, the symbolism is the cloud represents a pure angel with someone who is like a Son of Man seated on it. Jesus, we know is described as one like a Son of Man earlier in the text, so we may assume this is the same description of Jesus, but remember Jesus and God are one. The crown of gold symbolizes His seat of power, which was not in the previous description, showing us that He is now displaying His power. And the sharp sickle symbolizes a harvest. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the Earth is ripe." At that, the one seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the Earth and the Earth was harvested. Since God promised He would no longer punish mankind Himself, we can see here that He is harvesting the Earth. What does this mean? Doesn't it mean the people of the Earth will be cut down? That is not what the text says, it says the Earth was harvested. God has claimed those who He deemed worthy just as we read that He would in the words of Jesus.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had the charge of fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to the one with the sickle, "Take your sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the Earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe. The angel swung his sickle on the Earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horse's bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. This angel does something far different than what God just did. God reaped those who He deemed worthy. This angel is reaping something else. The angel with the charge of fire is symbolic of having the power of God's word. He tells the other angel to reap the grapes which symbolize wealth, abundance, and prosperity. The Earth's vine is symbolic of Jesus. Those wealthy, abundant, and prosperous people were tossed into the winepress which symbolizes judgment. Note that the winepress is outside of the city and as we know, that is where the people who are not of God reside, trampling the city. The blood which flows from the winepress is symbolic of life. A horse's bridle symbolizes the restraining power of God. Therefore, those wealthy, abundant, prosperous people would be smashed to new life within God's restraint. The 1,600 stadia

symbolize love (sixteen), and much (hundred). In other words, even though this vision comes across as one of punishment, when we understand the meaning of the symbolism, we see this is actually an act of much love within God's restraint to give new life to the wealthy, abundant, and prosperous but only through fierce change.

Let's take a moment and consider how these reaping's point us to our purpose. If we stand firm in God, He will collect us, and if we are tossed into the winepress and given new life, we know this is an act of love. So, what do we do with this? Do we see what God is doing here? He is gathering. He is gathering those who are worthy and those who can be saved. He is building a following. Perhaps that is a clue to our purpose. Before we discover our purpose, John gives us another series of seven. This time it is the seven bowls of God's wrath.

The seven plagues

John tells us he saw another great and marvelous sign in heaven. Seven angels with the seven last plagues. Last because with them, God's wrath is completed. John saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name. We've been given this description of the sea of glass before, meaning the multitude with clear purpose, however this time the glass is mixed with fire symbolizing the presence of God. So now the presence of God is with the multitude. They held harps given to them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." We should understand that the song of Moses relates to the Old Testament, and the song of the Lamb relates to the New Testament. The song tells us that God's plan comes together. We are part of that plan, but we still have not been enlightened to the plan, only hinted at.

Then John saw in the temple in heaven, the tabernacle of the testimony was opened. We know this is the temple which housed the ark containing the ten commandments. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore gold sashes across their chests. This symbolizes they are pure and in good standing. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels, seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power. No one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. John doesn't tell us which of the four living creatures hands the bowls to the angels. But we should take from this that he left it out intentionally to mean it comes from the representation of all living things. The bowls are symbolic as well. A bowl is what holds the oil in the base of a lamp. When the bowl is empty, the light is taken from the lamp. We will see this come to fruition. Note the description of God as, He who lives forever and ever, showing us that the timeline of these plagues does not have a starting point. They have been around and due to people's actions, they grow worse, to the point of destroying the light. Another note is the description of the temple filling with smoke. We know smoke symbolizes wickedness and sin. So why would God fill the temple with wickedness and sin? But John gives us the answer here when

he says the smoke is from the glory of God and His power, in conjunction with no one being able to enter until the smoke clears once the plagues are completed. We should understand this to mean that God has taken the last steps to eliminate wickedness and sin for all time.

Then John heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the Earth." Here we are told there is a voice from the temple, however weren't we told no one could enter the temple? Remember the temple is now filled with the smoke from the glory of God and His power. This voice can only be God.

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped the image. We should relate to these plagues, the seven spirits of God. The first spirit of God being Lord. We can see here that anyone who considered Satan to be lord, would get the plague brought down on them. These sores symbolize the distraction from our serenity. In understanding the timeline of these, let's consider the beginning of all things. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they did, they had a distraction from their serenity, these symbolic sores broke out on them, God's first punishment.

The second angel poured his bowl out on the sea, and it turned to blood like that of a dead man. Every living thing in the sea died. Again, this is symbolism. The sea- is the multitude of people. Blood- represents life, but this blood is described as being like that of a dead man, meaning it is taking life. Therefore, every living thing in the multitude of people died. The spirit of God we are to relate here is that of knowledge. Can we see how our lack of knowledge takes our life blood and turns it into death? If our knowledge is not of God but only of worldly things, we do not have true life within us. Again, relating back to Adam and Eve, their sin brought about death taking away mankind's immortality.

The third angel poured his bowl on the rivers and springs of water. They became blood. Then John heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgements, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them

blood to drink as they deserve." And John heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgements." The rivers and springs symbolize peace and hope. The spirit of God we should consider here is *understanding*. We are told the peace and hope become life (blood). But the meaning is deeper than just that. The people shed the blood of the followers of both God and Jesus and now they are to drink the life. Drinking is symbolic of receiving instruction. These people were to receive instruction related to *understanding*. If we are enlightened to how we have taken lives, will this not be a punishment for us? In understanding the timeline, did we not receive this *understanding* when Jesus was crucified?

The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given the power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues. But they refused to repent and glorify Him. The sun symbolizes Jesus' light and truth. So, Jesus' light and truth was given the power to scorch people with fire, symbolic of the presence of God. The spirit of God we should consider here is Wisdom. Jesus' light and truth, which is love, should be all the wisdom we need. However, if we ignore this, then the wisdom we receive is the painful burn of lost love. As for the timeline, does the Bible not provide us Jesus' light and truth?

The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. The spirit of God we should consider here is counsel. When the kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness, this symbolizes that it is now hidden from us. Yet the people still use their tongues to praise the beast. Therefore, they gnawed their tongues realizing the counsel they had followed was Satan's rather than God's. For the timeline, can we see Satan's throne today, or is it hidden from us? Are we part of the beast's kingdom or are we repentant of what we have done?

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. The Euphrates River, as we have already discussed, protected the people of that time and place from invaders. So, it symbolizes protection. Drying up- symbolizes losing all hope. Then John saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs. They came out of the mouth of the dragon, out

of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. Frogs symbolize the catching of prey with their tongues. It makes sense that they come out of the mouths of the beasts. The symbolism is that they present themselves as if speaking for God. John then gives us a quote without telling us who it comes from. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." This statement is made by Jesus. We know from previous references in the Bible that Jesus is described as coming like a thief. Staying awake and keeping clothes with us are both symbolic of living. Nakedness is symbolic of sin. Then John tells us they gathered the kings together in the place that is called Armageddon. The spirit of God we should consider here is power and might. So, we can see how these frogs, on behalf of the beasts, are gathering an army of power and might, but Jesus is also calling to His army of power and might by reminding us to be alive and not fall into sin. The place Armageddon is symbolic of a place where God defeats His enemies. In other words, these creatures are gathering their army in the place where they will be defeated. In our time, we have the words of the Bible spread across the entire world. We have those of us who believe and hold to our faith, and we have those of us who ignore and push aside any belief or faith. Do we see the two armies being gathered? Yet, Jesus' army needs *understanding*.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the Earth. It was tremendous. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath. Every island fled away, and the mountains could not be found. From the sky, huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

This angel pours it out on the air which symbolizes false theories. Then we hear the voice which once again can only be God since it is in the temple and this time on the throne giving it authority. The spirit of God we should consider here is fear of the Lord. God says, "It is done!" and then once again we see the flashes of lightning,

rumblings and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. Again, the lightning represents light or truth at great speed and thunder represents the voice of God. An earthquake is symbolic of change. In other words, the voice of God sends the light of truth which causes great change. The city being split into three parts is in reference to the city of man absent of God. The three parts symbolize the resurrection has begun. The cities of the nations collapse; what better example of fear of the Lord is there when all our cities collapse, meaning they lose their power?

Again, we have this reference to Babylon the great, however we will not be introduced to the meaning of this until we read further. But for some exegesis here, God gives Babylon the cup symbolic of judgement being passed. It is filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath which is symbolic of true doctrine, knowledge, wisdom, instruction, and truth. The next section refers us back to not only the seven seals, but also the seven trumpets. The islands fled away, and the mountains could not be found as we saw with the opening of the sixth seal. So now there is no place of solitude or power.

Remembering the pleas of the people in that text, the kings of the Earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of Jesus. And now we see those people got what they asked for and then cursed God for it. Also remember the event just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, at that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. At which point, the seventh trumpet sounds, and we are told the time of judgement has arrived. Remember, this is the third woe. So, we can see how the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl all occur in a final culmination.

The sevens

At this point it is important for us to draw some lines connecting what we have learned so far. The seven seals represent our natural instinct to sin: each related to a spirit of God. The seven trumpets represent the growth of our sins. The seven plagues represent the culmination of this sin to reach its peak and the suffering we would have because of it. Here it is broken down. Note how each seal, trumpet, and bowl relate back to the teaching of how we should handle our struggles in order to put forth true goodness and love through the understanding of the seven spirits of God. Even though the seals, trumpets, and bowls might seem different in nature under any one particular spirit, each is overcome through the spirits of the graces and the way they relate back to the spirit of God. What a fantastic description of such a wonderful setup.

1. Lord- the seal is symbolic of conquest, the trumpet is symbolic of our ability to destroy the Earth, and the bowl is symbolic of the distraction from our serenity. The letter to the first church tells us that if we overcome these things through insight into what it means to be Lord, then we will be able to eat from the tree of life.
2. Knowledge- the seal is symbolic of taking peace, the trumpet is symbolic of our political leaders losing the knowledge of God, and the bowl is symbolic of us not living for the right reasons. The letter to the second church tells us that if we overcome these things through helpfulness to spread knowledge, we will receive the crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death.
3. *Understanding*- the seal is symbolic of our money and greed, the trumpet is symbolic of the pain tied to our guilt, and the bowl is symbolic of our enlightenment to our guilt. The letter to the third church tells us that if we overcome these things through instruction, giving *understanding*, we will receive the truth of God's word and a white stone with a new name releasing us of our sins.
4. Wisdom- the seal is symbolic of death, the trumpet is symbolic of our wisdom being lost to darkness, and the bowl is symbolic of the pain we feel when enlightened to Jesus' truth. The letter to the fourth church tells us that if we overcome these things through encouragement based on wisdom, then we will receive Jesus and gain authority over the nations.
5. Counsel- the seal is symbolic of suffering impatience, the trumpet is symbolic of the destruction caused by our leaders, and the bowl is symbolic of the

secret counsel from Satan. The letter to the fifth church tells us that if we overcome these things through generosity of counsel, then we will be purified and walk with Jesus, and our names will be acknowledged in the book of life.

6. Power/might- the seal is symbolic of the emerging of the dark side of human nature, the trumpet is symbolic of the power of armies, and the bowl is symbolic of the evil behind those armies. The letter to the sixth church tells us that if we overcome these things through guidance regarding the proper use of power and might, then we get permission into the temple of God with Jesus' new name written on us.

7. Fear of the Lord- the seal is symbolic of people's lack of submission and therefore releases the trumpets, the trumpet is symbolic of the world becoming the kingdom of God and begins the time of judgement, and the bowl is symbolic of true fear of the Lord. The letter to the seventh church tells us that if we overcome these things through compassion helping each other turn the fear of the Lord into praise of the Lord, we will sit on the throne with God.

Do we see now what our purpose is? In the background of these sevens is the building of God's army, and the building of Satan's army. The message, to this point, has really been one of choosing sides. After hearing about the suffering which we will endure if we are on the side of the beasts, and the promise of reward if we are on the side of God, which would you pick? We have learned how our natural instincts cause us to sin, how our sin is worsened by our lack of acceptance, and how we are headed for a terrible time because of it. We learned that Jesus came to Earth to teach us the truth about God as goodness through love. And we learned that Satan came to Earth at the same time to deceitfully turn us from God and Jesus' teachings. We learned that the angels in heaven battled Satan and threw him down to Earth trapping him here with us. We learned how the battle between good and evil is not yet settled. We learned that we play a huge role in this battle. We learned that we are intended to be part of God's army. We learned that we are part of the plan to eliminate evil once and for all. So, what do we need to do in order to complete this task we have been given? How can we defeat Satan? John is about to tell us of God's ultimate plan to accomplish this task.

Babylon

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came to John and said, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the Earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the Earth were intoxicated with the wine of Her adulteries.” Ok, not much to translate regarding the use of the descriptive title prostitute. It simply means one who would demean themselves for money or Earthly belongings. The woman sitting on many waters, symbolizes that she has some control over many people. The term adultery here also does not directly relate to anything sexual. It is rather an unfaithfulness to God. The wine of her adulteries which intoxicated the people on Earth, represents her false doctrine making them unfaithful to God as well.

Then John says the angel carried him away in the spirit into a desert. There he saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. We’ll get a clue to the symbolism of this beast shortly. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE ABOMINATION OF THE EARTH” John saw the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. John said when he saw her, he was greatly astonished. But before we try to understand the meaning of this image, let’s first hear what the angel has to say, “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. This calls for a mind of wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. The ten horns you saw are the ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will

overcome them because He is Lord of Lords and King of kings- and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers."

The angel continues. However, John took a break here so we will too. The scarlet color to the beast represents sin and corruption. The blasphemous names are symbolic that the character it portrayed was one which caused mankind to focus all their time and energy toward this one thing rather than God. The angel tells us several times the beast once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction. Finally, after referencing the beast from the abyss multiple times, we now can figure out what it symbolizes. Look, there is no symbolism here. There didn't need to be. This message was not written for the people then. The angel told them, now is not. That means they don't need to worry about it. But then we hear that it will come up out of the abyss and go to its destruction. That doesn't sound so bad. Then another clue, the inhabitants whose names are not written will be astonished when they see it. Then we are told, this calls for a mind of wisdom.

It is fossil fuels. Here in today's time, we know oil and gas comes from hydrocarbons which formed from ancient living tissue under specific pressure for a really long time. We now know through our scientific research over all the years, that these hydrocarbons came from the dinosaurs. They once were, at the time John wrote his text, were not, and now here they are again. And aren't we all astonished? We also know that fossil fuels are a finite resource. That means there is only so much of it. So, is it not true to say it is going to its destruction? This one cannot be backed up in the biblical text. Just think for a minute, if John were to write in this text that a long time ago dinosaurs walked the Earth and then died and compressed for a ridiculous number of years, and then we dug them up and fueled everything in our lives with their remains, what would the people have interpreted this to mean over the two-thousand years since it was written? Would this text have even made it into the Bible, or would it have been kicked by the church at some point? Of course, reading it today, we would not have questioned John if he had written that craziness. It makes sense to us. So, it's not stated in the text, but honestly, how could it be?

The seven heads are the seven hills on which the woman sits. We also know the woman sat on many waters meaning she was over the people. Once again, we have to think outside the box now. Everything John saw to this point in his text was teaching

people how to navigate this life during the patient endurance, but now he is being shown a future event. The symbolism gets lost. There is really no symbolic meaning for a hill, John simply didn't know how else to state it. A mountain would have symbolized an empire, but that wasn't right. He is talking about the seven continents on which we live. It was the only word he could use which would make sense to us now and still hold some meaning in that time. Interesting though, the use of the number seven. It really is perfect. He combined heads into the meaning as well to symbolize it was some sort of kingdom, or top-level descriptor. The angel tells us they are also the seven kings. This means leadership. Five have fallen, meaning they already lost God, one is, meaning one was still of God at the time. The other which has not yet come is North America or more directly pointed, the United States of America.

The angel tells us once that king comes, he will remain for a while. Then the angel tells us that the beast going to its destruction is an eighth king who belongs to the seven. Do you see how oil and gas is its own kingdom? The leading oil and gas companies in the world have positions set up in all countries so it belongs to the seven. And the eighth king is headed to its destruction. Then we hear that the ten horns are the ten kings who have not yet gotten a kingdom. The symbolism of the number ten means completeness. The oil and gas companies we mentioned, those are the ten kings but not just them, the organizations and web of societal assimilation reach much farther than just oil and gas companies. Think of corporation. Look at the company you work for. How invested is it into fossil fuels? Before you go looking at how many oil and gas companies there are to prove this wrong, pay heed to the symbolism of ten- completeness. These companies do have authority as kings. They are some of the largest organizations on Earth. They have one purpose, money, and they give their power and authority to the beast, in other words, they attribute the oil and gas to what they have accomplished. These companies do make war against Jesus, they promote the gain of wealth and excess items, not the love of each other. Please understand the generalization, this is simply saying, these companies have surely taken us to a new level of greed. Population increases, industry, global warming, and so on have all rapidly occurred since the discovery of fossil fuels. All these things as we know are leading the way to our own destruction. The continents themselves ride on it. Abandoning our life of devotion to love, we have all jumped on the train of excess material possession and luxury, the prostitute. Of course, Jesus will overcome as the angel said, it was in the

plan from the beginning. However, He needs His called, chosen, and faithful followers to be with Him.

Now John continues with the angel's message, "The waters you saw where the prostitute sits, are the peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages." Hey look! That's the group John is supposed to prophesy to again. That's us! "The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the Earth." So why would the beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute? Well, let's first understand more about this woman.

The woman was dressed in purple symbolizing royalty and scarlet symbolizing sin. Glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls, symbolizes that she represents money and not just money but the most tempting money there is. The golden cup in her hand is symbolic of trials and tests. It is filled with abominable things and unfaithfulness to God. The title written on her forehead, meaning this is what her focus was, "MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE ABOMINATION OF THE EARTH". Babylon the great represents the whole of our modern society. The people of the world have now become one. Of course, we fight and have separation, but with the advancements in our technology we meet with people across the world on a daily basis. But this worldwide society, which is not named, nor recognized, and therefore a mystery still, is the mother of all who defile themselves for money. And it is the abomination of the Earth. It comes from us, it is made up of us, we created it. It came out of the Earth, from the creatures of the Earth, and the people of the Earth sit atop it, getting rich and losing sight of those things which matter most.

It isn't just our cities and cultures; it's the culmination of everything we humans do. It's the way we have to wear certain things before we go out in public. It's the way we are forced into living how others tell us we should live, even when we know it goes outside of our moral beliefs. It's the pressures put on us; it's the entire web of all of it across the entire world. John told us he noticed she was drunk with the blood of the saints, meaning she had given false doctrine, taking life out of those who had tried to

spread the good word. So now that we know the woman is the representation of our modern world-wide society (for lack of a better word), why would oil and gas (the beast) and our corporations (the ten horns) hate the woman? Understanding that the woman is our society, and we are destroying the beast by using all of the oil and gas, don't we create a problem in this? Won't they hate us at that time, knowing we are the vessel of their destruction? The angel says the beast and the ten kings will bring her to ruin and leave her naked. In other words, the oil and gas industry will ruin our world-wide society, leaving it spiritually dead. The angel says they will eat our flesh and burn us with fire, meaning they will assimilate our physical focus and change our state completely. Then it is explained that this was God's plan to accomplish His purpose by allowing fossil fuels to rule our lives until God's words are fulfilled. Let's consider again what God's purpose is. If we now understand God to be goodness and love, what is the purpose of goodness and love? Is it not to take away anything that is dark, painful, and awful in our lives? Therefore, isn't the purpose of God to eliminate evil? Do you see now how we are part of this plan? God needs us in order to destroy evil once and for all.

After this, John says he saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the Earth was illuminated by his splendor. He shouted with a mighty voice, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the Earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the Earth grew rich from her excess luxuries." This angel who comes down from heaven, note it is not fallen, illuminates the Earth, meaning it makes it so we can see the truth again. It tells us that the world-wide society has been spiritually and morally degraded. It tells how we let so many awful things into our lives without concern. We have followed the false doctrine and become unfaithful to God. And don't the merchants of the Earth become rich from all the excess luxuries we consume?

Then John heard another voice in heaven say, "Come out of her my people," this tells us the voice is that of God. No other would be so bold as to call us their people. Since God created us, God can call us His. As you read this quote from God, think about the mystery Babylon as our society. "Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are

piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her; death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the Earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!' The merchants of the Earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more- cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh, and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages, and bodies and souls of men. They will say 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."

Then John tells us a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea. This is to symbolize God's strength on all people through painful sacrifice. Then the angel said "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players, and trumpeters will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and

bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the Earth." And won't that be the case? We are like the antelope grazing on a full pasture with excess. Our numbers have increased thanks to our plentiful resources. So, what happens when those resources run out? What will we eat then? Imagine the painful sacrifices we will all have to make. We will have to sacrifice all of our excesses and then some. People will inevitably die just like the antelope when their supply runs out. We've now been told this is what is coming. And it is not hard to believe, especially today.

After this, John heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgements. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the Earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His saints." John was kind enough to help us know who shouted this message and it was the great multitude in heaven. In case you aren't sure, the first word from them "Hallelujah!" is simply an expression of rejoicing. And then in the next part of their shout, they reaffirm that God has been fair. They say He condemned the great prostitute, meaning us or should we say our human society. Thereby, He avenged on us the lives of those we killed who were truly of God. You see, at this point we need to realize the entire plan. God's plan. He set it in motion from creation. Even then He knew we would someday sit here typing on our computers and using these fossil fuels. He knew then that our growth rate from this would be astronomical. God has been with us from the beginning, providing us a message of goodness. He even sent Jesus down here to show us how to love, because what better definition of goodness is there than true love? When the time came for the discovery of fossil fuels, we would either have learned our lesson and become a loving society, or we would still reject the goodness and love we knew to be right. The army in heaven cast Satan down to us and because of this, God knew we would fall into the latter. So, the multitude is cheering because God avenged the lives of those worthy people by destroying the very thing which caused their death. The mystery, the prostitute, the one we now know to be our human society- Babylon.

And again, they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." This means our sin is going to leave us forever and ever. How could it not? If that sin is based on our greed, our society, and our excess luxuries we've gained

through the use of fossil fuels, then in the sudden absence of those fuels, how could that sin continue? Imagine this world with no fuel for our vehicles. How will you get from place to place? Aren't the destinations too far to reach without them? If you are spending excess money on clothing, when the fossil fuels run out and the clothing is no longer made, will you share your excess with those who need it? Let's continue, perhaps we haven't heard the final act yet.

The bride

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” The term cried was chosen carefully here to either indicate they were weeping or indicate they were exclaiming. They were exclaiming. We have already been told that one of the gifts of our reward is that we will no longer weep. These which were closest to God, were certainly not weeping, they were praising God.

Then a voice came from the throne saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!” The voice came from the throne, so who was it? God, Jesus, the throne itself? It is the throne. Even the throne itself praises God and belongs to Him.

Then John heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder. Now the voice of the multitude was a call of all people which resembled the voice of God. And they were shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (John tells us, Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Wow! Now Jesus is going to get married! Who is this bride? We have been given a clue to this answer in the clothing she was given, fine linen which John spells out for us as symbolizing the righteous acts of the saints. Do you see? A wedding is the joining of two into one. This woman wears the righteous acts of the saints. Remember how the woman riding the beast represented our wicked human culture. Now we are hearing of this new woman, and she is going to be the bride of Jesus, becoming one with Him. She is clearly the new, great city!

Then the angel told John to write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” and John says the angel added: “These are the true words of God.” This verified we understood that these were not the angel’s words, but God’s.

The second coming

John then says he fell at the angel's feet to worship him. But the angel said "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." This angel stopped John from worshipping it and exclaimed to him to worship God. John is telling us he got in a bit of trouble there. He almost worshipped the angel of the Lord instead of the Lord. But we find some reassurance here as the angel tells us the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The testimony of Jesus is simply, love. And therefore, love is the spirit of prophecy, the vein of the Word. The angel gave John the words of God, this amazed John to find out this angel spoke to God, so he was going to worship the angel. The angel however, stopped him and redirected him, but also reminded him the way to have God's words in order to give them, is through loving each other. If we are only speaking with true love, then aren't we speaking on behalf of God?

John then tells us that he saw heaven standing open and before him was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes were like blazing fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He was dressed in a robe dipped in blood and His name was the Word of God. Let's go over some more symbolism. The white horse is symbolic of pure strength in battle. The hints of the rider should enlighten us as to their identity. It is of course Jesus, faithful and true, who judges with justice. The eyes symbolize wisdom and *understanding* and since they are blazing fire, we know Jesus' wisdom and *understanding* is profound with the word of God. His head had many crowns as He is the king of kings and the Lord of Lords. The description of the robe tells us this is Christs' righteousness come to life.

John says the armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. John references a quote "He will rule them with an iron scepter." Then continues saying, He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh, He had this name written: "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." So, the armies of heaven had pure strength in battle and were alive in purity through Jesus. Notice Jesus' weapon is His words. That is the symbolism of the sword from His mouth. Jesus will finally strike down the nations by

nothing more than His words. Then John finally gives the interpretation of the old prophecy regarding Jesus ruling with an iron scepter. The winepress was already part of the visions John had, however when the Earth was reaped of its grapes and they were tossed into the winepress, we weren't told at that time what or who was pressing them. Now we know it was Jesus.

Then John saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." The angel comes to power in the light of Jesus' truth. That is the meaning of standing in the sun. The rest of this message is one which is very confusing. The birds can either represent wicked or good people. Flying in midair- represents they are undecisive, in motion, and not decided to be one way or another. The angel tells them to prepare to eat the flesh, meaning to assimilate the physical nature. In other words, this angel calls for all wicked people who pretend they are over others but are not, to go ahead and assimilate and become wicked. The birds were told to prepare to eat, not to eat yet. Then John says he saw the beast and the kings of the Earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. Now we can understand how the birds receive the great supper of God. Jesus had now struck down all evil men by His words; therefore, they were, at that time, considered clean for the birds to eat, drawing those undecided people closer to God. We should also note the ease at which the battle is decided. The beast is simply captured. It gathered up and prepped for this great battle only to be immediately and simply captured along with its deceitful partner. Another note to mention is the fiery lake of burning sulfur. There have been multiple times now we have recognized the symbolism between fire and the presence of God, however this fire is described as burning sulfur meaning it is a destructive fire. So now the leaders focused on ruling over the people, the deception which gave them their power, and their armies had been destroyed.

Now John says he saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. John says after that he must be set free for a short time, but the meaning and reasoning for this is for a later time to come. Then John saw thrones and seated on the thrones were those who had been given authority to judge. He also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Then John gives us a little side note for clarification; the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. John says this is the first resurrection. He says "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

It should be clear at this point in the timeline; we are into the future from the time of this writing. It is clear to us that the beast still roams the Earth, the false prophet still deceives us, the prostitute Babylon still gets her strength from us, and Satan is certainly not cast into the abyss. Some readers here have a tendency to think that this vision given to John was out of order and they play the timeline in different ways to suit them. Perhaps people are looking for some comfort, some way to believe this world isn't doomed. However, this world is doomed as we have seen. But now, in the vision, the dragon, Satan himself, has been cast down into the abyss where our troubles came from. Then we see all of the people from all history who had stayed true to the teachings of God and Jesus and had not allowed Satan or his beasts to deceive them, even to the point of losing their lives. Would we be willing to give our lives for the truth we believe in? Isn't that our struggle now? We can't have a home to live in, food to eat, or water to drink unless we make money feeding into the machine. But why do we always think we are so different than the ancient people. They had many of the same issues, needing jobs, and currency in order to secure homes, food, and water. These are the people who were willing to sacrifice all, even their lives to spread the word of God. We are weak, spoiled people with excess which blinds us to the truth of life. So, these great people get the opportunity to assist in judgement and are allowed

to rule on the Earth with Jesus. They are the first ones resurrected back to life. What great leaders they would be.

Then John tells us that when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the Earth- Gog and Magog- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the Earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Ok let's think about this as it relates to our questions of what we are here for, what is our purpose? We've already been informed we are part of God's plan and Jesus needs His faithful followers to defeat the demon and the false prophet and the kings of the Earth and their armies. But before that happens, we have to create the prostitute Babylon and then, using our greed and impatience, through our use of fossil fuels, destroying her, finally crashing our civilizations down, hitting rock bottom, so to speak. This is not to say we should march out against her. All we have to do is patiently endure, these things are already set in motion. Let's think back to Genesis for a minute. God made the Earth like a garden for us. We were told we were here to tend and care for it. Instead, we tried to make the Earth tend and care for us due to the deceit of the devil. Since then, our race has been building a society to compete with God. We've had no reason. Everything we ever needed was here on this Earth for us and we decided to complicate it and make it painful. We were relentless we wanted more, and God needed to break us. What better way than to allow us to build up to the greatest city possible, one so large it was literally destroying the Earth and then rip it out from under us. This causes us to sacrifice all those extras we worked so hard for over thousands of years. This returns us back to the garden doesn't it. Except that now our garden has been poisoned. Yet there are still a group of God's people. And of course, there is still a group of people who are not God's people. As we learned in Genesis, Adam and Eve are cast from the garden and end up living with other people, those who God had placed on the Earth on the sixth day. They are however the vessel of Satan's destruction and have been there since the beginning. Now we hear reference to them again as Gog and Magog. It is the native people of the Earth who were created by God

but were not yet touched by His love or goodness. So now our civilizations are destroyed, the godless people are wandering the Earth, and a group of God's people are encamped together. But this time, God Himself comes down from heaven symbolized as fire and devours them. Then the devil is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. You see, we are the trap. A trap doesn't work without bait. Goodness is finally condemning evil, and we are the means to that end whether we like it or not. It is coming.

The judgement

John then saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And John saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. John notes, the lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Well, that's the ultimate punishment, isn't it? To know your deeds were not righteous and then be thrown into a lake full of the presence of God where for all time, you will have to know you did wrong. The throne is white- meaning through the final destruction of Evil, God's throne has been purified.

Then John saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first Earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. Note the sea here still symbolizes the masses of people. John says he saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And John heard a loud voice from the throne saying "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Then He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." That makes sense since the deceitful Satan has been cast into the fire. He said to John, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The new city

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the last plagues came and said to John, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." John says he carried him away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed him the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. John says the angel had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. John says the angel measured the city with the rod and it was 12,000 stadia in length. And as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall, and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonix, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each gate was made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Alright, let's break down some of the symbolism here before proceeding. The angel took John to a great mountain which symbolizes a kingdom. The brilliance of the city being like jasper clear as crystal symbolizes it is purely in the glory of God. The number twelve- symbolizes the rule of the kingdom of heaven, in other words, these people making up this great city (remember a city is symbolic of the people) are the kingdom of heaven. The three gates on the four sides represent that all created things from the Earth had their resurrection into this city. So, the twelve tribes of Israel represented the way into this great city. The twelve foundations were the twelve apostles of Jesus who started the church on Earth and therefore the city would be built up from them. Then they measure the walls, and we get the number twelve repeated here. That can only mean the city walls are made up of those of us who choose to believe, choose to love each other above everything else, and choose to put goodness first in our lives.

Note the wall thickness is the tribes of Israel multiplied by the apostles and noted to be man's measuring techniques. What more do we need in order to know that we are the walls? The walls which protect the city. And now the wall is described as jasper meaning in the glory of God. The city itself, the culmination of all people is made of gold as pure as glass. Meaning we are rich, but not with money. We are rich with goodness and love.

Then we hear of the foundation's symbolism. The first is jasper- glory of God, the second is sapphire- protection, the third is chalcedony- faithful service, the fourth is emerald- truth, the fifth is sardonix- healing, the sixth is carnelian- fire of divine anger, the seventh is chrysolite- wisdom, the eighth is beryl- creation, the ninth is topaz- peace, the tenth is chrysoprase- a different form of faithful service, the eleventh is jacinth- royalty but of a different nature, the twelfth is amethyst- purity of spirit. The gates are pearls. The pearls symbolize wealth. However, these gates are one pearl each, meaning they are not symbolizing wealth in riches, but instead wealth in spirit. Again, the great street of the city is rich, but not with money. So, the city is built on: the Glory of God, protection, faithful service, truth, healing, fire of divine anger, wisdom, creation, peace, faithful service of a different form, royalty of a different nature, and purity of spirit.

John goes on to tell us he did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the Earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed John the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on

their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever. The river symbolizes peace, and the flowing water symbolizes the holy spirit of Jesus going out from the throne and providing life to the righteous souls symbolized as the fruit.

Then the angel said to John, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place. Behold I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

Then John gives us testimony to say it was him, "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But He said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!' Then He told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophesy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what He has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. The spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophesy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.'"

A brief history

Returning to the story of the Bible, we left off as the apostles were in the process of building up the original Christian church. We were starting to understand they faced the same opposition which brought Jesus to His death. But they were growing the number of followers, and it was not going unnoticed, both with the group of Christians, and with the Roman leadership. As the years passed since Jesus' death and the apostles were dying off, most of them meeting horrific deaths, the leadership of the Christian church was being handed down to the next generation. When we read about the kings of Israel and Judah, we saw examples of how the subsequent generations carry over the same mistakes as the previous generation. We know that not all are able to walk in God's ways. We know, from John's writing, that Jesus was already telling the church to be careful and to set itself up properly. We know, from the *understanding* we have reached so far, that the church struggled with this at that time and has not corrected itself even today.

Regardless of how the church was struggling with its intended purpose, they were reaching the people. The Romans knew this and saw it as a threat to the leadership of their way of life. War broke out. About thirty years after the death of Jesus, Rome was in an intense fight against the Jewish people and against Jerusalem in particular. Titus Vespasian was the man in charge of the assault being brought on Jerusalem. Although we have already gone through the books of the Bible, we are not lost when looking for the next part of the story. It was at this time that historical records of notable events were better recorded. We have the historical documents showing what happened from the time of Jesus up through today. Titus attacked the city and overthrew it. He had it destroyed, leaving only a few towers to put Roman guards on. There is debate whether Titus ordered it or not, but the temple was also destroyed, burned, and completely demolished. The people of Jerusalem were either killed, taken prisoner, ordered to be slaves, or sent to brothels, they were scattered.

When returning to Rome, Titus marched in with a grand parade celebrating the defeat of Jerusalem. They marched in carrying some of the articles from the temple and, it is said, with a group of Christians being led through the crowd in chains. Records show it was a group of Jewish people, and they do not specifically state Christians. However, it is likely, because at this time, the Christians were being persecuted greatly, being crucified, tortured, attacked by lions, and burned among other things.

Not only were their lives at risk, but they were demeaned by the native populations as well. There is archaeological evidence of graffiti found in cities in the middle east. Similar to our time today when you walk into a public restroom and derogatory things are found written on the wall, in one city there was writing found in a latrine stating, "Martha defecates where she eats". The name Martha was a Hebrew name, so it has been presumed that this was intending to comment about all Hebrews. We also have records that Christian women were sent to Pompeii as sex slaves. Although this has been debated as well. Look at the way we treat those we see as less than ourselves today and imagine if it was any different in those days. The point is, there is no doubt the Christian people were being mistreated.

Nine years after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem, the volcano found near Pompeii erupted and is listed as one of the greatest natural disasters of all time. People were killed by the eruption so fast that they were preserved in their positions up until recent years when they were excavated. It is said, Titus thought this was God's wrath for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

Despite the opposition they faced, the Christian movement was growing still. It continued to do so over the course of the next couple of hundred years. Then a man came into power in Rome named Constantine. During this time there was a lot of civil war taking place in Rome. On his way into battle one day, Constantine says he saw an image similar to a cross and words saying, "In this sign, conquer". As this account was written decades later, there is debate over its truth. However, we do know he went on to win that battle and from then on, he converted to Christianity being baptized shortly before his death. He became emperor of all Rome, and he is credited with legalizing Christianity. There is much to be said about the way this happened and all of the circumstances around it. Some say he did this in order to get the Christian people to join the Roman army. Others indicate he wanted the money from the church to be in the hands of Rome. It is also said he was the first to use the cross as the symbol for Christianity, however, archeological evidence indicates the cross symbol was present prior to his time. He is still credited for it as it became prominent after his reign. He also made crucifixion from the courts illegal. What we need to understand is that although God was no longer speaking to the people, and Jesus was no longer with us, we can see how God has still directed everything to His purpose. This raises a question though. We know Jesus had the power to have whatever He asked of God. So, if God's

purpose was to bring the kingdom of God to Earth, why didn't He do it when Jesus was here. Jesus Himself said that if He wanted, He could call an army of angels down to fight for Him. He could have forced the issue then. So why wait? Why was God holding back from bringing the kingdom but still putting men such as Constantine in positions to continue to elevate the church? When we know what God's purpose is, we will know the answer to this question.

Around the same time as Constantine, there was an Egyptian archbishop named Athanasius who received the texts of the gospels written by the apostles. It has been said that he decided many of them were heresy and threw them into the Nile River except for twenty-seven of them which are now the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. However, there is no historical backing regarding his destruction of any of the texts. He wrote the Easter Letter of 367 AD where he listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. During this time, it is presumed that some of the gnostic texts were hidden away at Nag Hamadi where we would find them many years later.

Now the leaders of the Christian church were heavily entrenched in the affairs of the Roman nation as a whole. Politics and religion were being mixed together as one. The yeast of the Romans was mixing in. This continued for the next few hundred years. As this happened, they continued to suppress women, and they became an arm of the Roman empire. The people were still getting accustomed to recognizing a Jewish person versus a Christian person. The name of Christianity grew in recognition at that time. Now we reach the time when the Western Roman Empire fell and was divided up.

Around a hundred years after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, closing in on six-hundred years after the time of Jesus, is when a man named Muhammad is said to have claimed he was taken to meet and talk with Jesus. It has been said he claimed to have been told by Jesus that he would be Jesus' successor. However, in canonical Islamic teachings, this is not represented. The Islamic story begins that Muhammad would regularly go into a cave alone and pray. One time, when doing this, he says he is met by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel tells him to read a scroll, but Muhammad was illiterate and when he told Gabriel about this, Gabriel choked him three times, each time Muhammad told Gabriel he was illiterate. This is the first story of Muhammad being visited by the angel and does not fit with the other stories we have read about

Gabriel. Some say Gabriel choked him, but the Quran simply says he commanded him to read. So, since Muhammad was illiterate, Gabriel read the scroll to him and made him commit it to memory. Muhammad started to preach to the people telling them about God, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. He could not write, but as he spoke, he would have others write it down for him. This became what is known as the Quran.

In the early churches of Islam, the Jewish and Christian community were welcomed although the history is much more complex than just that. He had both support and opposition. Muhammad faced many battles as he led many more people to call on the name of God and to learn the stories the Christian movement was spreading. It is said when he had visions he would suffer severe seizures. It is absolute that this was all done to serve God's purpose. But a caution to the community of Muslims, understand the core of the message. There are passages in Muhammad's teaching, found in the Quran, which do not fit. For example, Muhammad told the people they were supposed to face Jerusalem and lay themselves out in compromised positions to pray. This later changed to say they must face Mecca. Regardless, this is not what Jesus taught us when He told us to go into our rooms and have an honest conversation with God. Find what matches the truth of God's purpose for us and stop following those things which do not fit. Whether it was Muhammad himself who mistook these things, or those who wrote it for him changing it, there is no directive for us to kill each other, it is the opposite. Correct the message to match. So now there were three main religions in the world, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. All three have the same God, all three follow the same stories, and even in our time today, all three are at odds with each other, all three are missing the *understanding*… Christian church, it is up to you to fix this! God had His reason for it at the time; this is a new time. Understand.

Muhammad's life was right around the end of the eras we refer to as Classical and post classical antiquity. We then move into the Middle Ages. Before we discover the history of the Bible in medieval times, we should understand it's very beginning. The original books, the oldest of the Old Testament books, were passed down through song and story over the full history of mankind. Then books such as the books of the kings were added over the course of time, as well as the books of the prophets. Don't think these scrolls were kept separate from each other. It has been a collection since its beginning. Later the books known as the Gospels were added, those written by the apostles. Selections of these were hidden away in caves in Qumran and were discovered in

the year of our Lord, 1945 AD. Those which were hidden away give us evidence to the origination of these texts and the origination of these scrolls have been dated back to approximately the time of Jesus and shortly thereafter. In the meantime, those hidden texts were not the only copies. Yes, although the printing press would not be around for many more years, the people would make copies of these texts to be distributed. When they were plundered many copies of these texts were destroyed throughout the years. But it was never totally removed. So, moving on to the Middle Ages, we know they had some form of these texts available to them. Christianity, despite its persecution in classical and post classical antiquity, grew. Once adopted in Rome, it was just as unstoppable as Rome itself for some time. But as we know Rome faded and the texts have not.

Between the years 1200 AD and 1300 AD King Richard the lionhearted along with several others including the knights Templar fought many battles, attempting to keep Jerusalem and the Holy Land under control of the Christians. The templars were known to help many people, but because of their financial assistance, many such as England itself were in great debt to them. Rumors started going around that the templars were heretic, spitting on the Bible and the cross, and stating there was no Christ. Many were arrested, tortured, and forced to admit to doing these things even though there was no evidence of it, and most believe this was fabricated to cover that they were being killed simply to eliminate a financial debt. There really is not much more to this story. Many stories today circulate around these knights, but there is no conspiracy regarding them in our time.

In the Middle Ages, around the year of our Lord 1500 AD, King Henry the eighth, who was the king of England, broke away from Rome because the church would not support his divorce, although this is likely a simplified explanation and was almost certainly coupled with other impasses. He worked with a man he knew named William Tindale to translate the Bible. The two of them did not see eye to eye regarding the content of the text and the king killed William for it. Afterward, King Henry the eighth wrote his own version and enhanced the protestant reformation which started with Martin Luther's theses, and he created the church of England. About a hundred years later, King James used his position to force a new translation. The King James version is still read in places around the world at the time of this writing. However, we know he removed or added certain words and phrases to suit his needs. It is also nearly

impossible to understand, as its verbiage and candor are those of a time and people who we can't relate to any more than we can to the original writings.

We have now proceeded into the Renaissance age. During the later part of that age is when Galileo lived, who was an Italian astronomer, physicist, and engineer. This is the time when science was beginning to be discovered in more detail than ever before and is known as the Scientific Revolution.

In 1776 AD the illuminati come around. This was a group which strongly opposed religion. They did not hold much power and were forced to be a secret society, this is true. However, at that time, secret societies were made illegal. The illuminati are not still in practice today as some think. There is something we call the Dunning Kruger effect which is having a false confidence in the knowledge of something. This is what causes conspiracy theory, not only that, but it is also the source of the cults we see come into being. Have true knowledge so that we don't fall into this. Interesting how this came into being shortly after the increase in scientific studies.

With the emergence of science, we enter the age of discovery. This is also the time people migrated from Europe to the Americas. Those who first came to America brought with them the King James version of the Bible. Most know the history of America, it was recent, well recorded, and vile. People traversed the sea and when they arrived, they spread across America, both north and south. They didn't convert and care for the native people, instead they used their advancements and power to over-throw and take the land from the native people. Those in North America fought against the English, the natives, and each other in order to set up the United States of America. The people believe Americans fought for their freedom, and there is some truth to that. But what the Americans have done with that freedom is not righteous. Through the course of it, however, they did make advancements toward living with freedom such as the abolishment of slavery.

Moving into the modern era comprised of industrial, machine, nuclear, space, and information ages, we know the discovery of the dead sea scrolls and shortly thereafter was the writing of the New International Version of the Bible. This one was written by over a hundred scholars and should be considered the most accurate of the versions available at the time of this writing. It is also the one used for this writing.

So, to recap, Adam's descendants were the first to call on the name of God. We then move on to Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and then those who called on the name of God were known as Israelites. Then we move on through Moses, the judges, the kings, and the prophets through to Jesus. Then based on the teaching of Jesus, the Christian movement is born, and the Jewish faith did not follow. The Christian church was rolled into the Roman governmental structure, then the Islam faith came into being although not following the truth of the Word either. The Roman influence on the Christian movement changed it from its very beginning. This is the Roman Catholic Church. The English broke away from this and formed the Protestant Christian church, although flawed by the influence of the power of leadership. This is the church which spread to the Americas. Since then, there have been other denominations which have formed such as the Baptist and Lutheran Churches. Then the dead sea scrolls were found, and the New International Version was written. This brings us to the current state of the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian faiths, still confounded and missing the *understanding* of the truth of the Word. The Word has been given, yet humanity stands at the choice between hearing and *understanding*.

God's purpose

Do we now have the answer to what God's purpose is for our existence? We know that God put us here from the very beginning. The habitat was not just made for us, but we are a part of it. The question is why. Why would God create us? Is He lonely and bored and just needed something to do? This is quite the creation for such a simple request. The answer is in the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *Understand* what this existence on Earth means. God placed the burden on us of hunger and thirst and desire. It was His intent from the very start that we *understand* the knowledge of good and evil. Like the serpent said, this would make us like God having the knowledge of both good and evil. So, now we can discern that God created us with the intent of *understanding* good and evil. Again, we must ask why? Think of the conflict between good and evil. It is entrenched in our stories. It is entrenched in our history.

How could God explain the many complexities of good and evil while maintaining free will? When our children come of age, we have taught them along the way what we know to be good and evil, then we let them exercise their free will and hope that we have had an impact with our teaching. And what do we hope of them? Do we hope they will exercise goodness, or that which is evil? We know inside ourselves that doing what is good is right. We also see how our society, the mighty Babylon, revolves around money rather than God. That which was known as luxury in the time of Jesus is not so different today, except that money has a stronger foothold. We leave our children in the care of others while we venture out each day to earn the money required to sustain ourselves and our families. Not all those caring for our children are doing it out of love, but they too are doing it for the money. Our children are forced to grow up confused regarding good and evil. We teach them morality which states money and oppression are wrong, but we show them that money and oppression are good as we teach them to want luxury. We need to turn our hearts from our own desire for money and luxury and turn our hearts to our children. Money is the source of oppression in today's time. It has oppressed every person on the Earth. Understand this and begin the exodus from its oppression. A free man has no envy. Although freedom is good, freedom to oppress is evil.

Consider that this wisdom was with God during the creation of all things. But evil, Satan, was not cast down from heaven until the time when Jesus came to the Earth.

We read there was a battle waging in heaven. This is the battle between good and evil, God and Satan. Satan tested Job, and God prevailed. Satan was cast out of heaven and sent to the Earth. Think of a giant funnel with the Earth at the base of it. It opens wider as it reaches beyond the Earth to the heavens. God cast Satan down the funnel to the Earth, here with us. This is the gateway to the abyss. Understand the key of David, to stand up alone against the giant! When each of us does this, it opens the abyss at the base of the funnel and evil can be cast down into it. God will never allow Satan to return to heaven in any form. We must understand this! If evil exists in us, we also will not be allowed to enter heaven. The creation is the trap to end evil, for all time. God cast evil away from Himself. It is trapped here and has no way out. Satan too, has the knowledge of good and evil and therefore is like God. Satan thinks that he can win us over and use us to overthrow God. This will not happen! We are in the front line of the battle! We must stand our ground against the dragon!

It is God's purpose for us that we learn the knowledge of good and evil, and then choose the side of good, join together with God in His fight! This is not a battle we can win with guns or bombs. This is a battle of the spirit. Think about the revelation of Christ Jesus. The abyss is where evil will be sent. But we must eliminate it from the Earth. We have an opportunity to help. God's creation is perfect, and evil will not rise again! But it is up to us to ensure this. We are part of that perfect creation. God designed us to have the ability to fight off wickedness by opening the abyss. One person alone cannot defeat all evil. We can only defeat evil within ourselves. But if each does this, then we will have defeated it as a whole. Why are we not seeing this? The time has come to open our eyes!

Now think about this, the serpent was not wrong, we will be like God having the knowledge of both good and evil. But why would God allow others to have the same power as He does if they are not expelling evil from themselves, just as God has. Satan was with God and was expelled from heaven. We, having the knowledge of good and evil, are with God. Do we not believe He would expel us just the same? If we are like God, then would we not have the same powers God has? But there is a door. Satan will not be allowed back through this door, even if he is hiding in one of us. The door is narrow and only some of us will find it. Satan will find it, but it will not open for him. If he is with us, it will not open for us either. But if our hearts are true to God, the door will be opened for us. We must however be perfect in our spirit just as God is perfect.

If we can be like God with the knowledge of good and evil, then we can be one with God. In order to do this, just as Jesus said, we will have to be perfect. The way to be perfect is to consider that every action of your life, both seen and unseen will be called to witness before God at your time of judgement. Imagine everyone on Earth being able to see everything you ever did or said. If you can allow this with no shameful acts to speak of, then you have lived perfectly. None of us are in this perfect space. This is where Jesus' forgiveness comes in. God, while here on Earth in the form of Jesus, realized we did not *understand*. He told us it does not matter what is in your gallery. Simply remove those things from your life and you will be forgiven and accepted. But we have also been warned. Any of us who have this *understanding* and continue in wicked ways will suffer a worse fate. That is saying we are like God with the *understanding* of both good and evil and choose evil. Jesus never said he forgives us all our sin. What he said was, if we repent, if we change our ways and walk in God's ways, then he will forgive all our sins. Stop using Jesus as a way to justify an allowance of our sins!

As Paul said to the Romans, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of one man, death reigned through the one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that,

just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We continue in our wicked ways, not walking in God's ways, not following the teachings of Jesus. And see what the result is. We grow more pestilent toward each other and are killing the Earth. Instead of being the salt of the Earth, preserving life, we have become cancer to it. It will end, one way or another. This Earth will die. Evil will go with it, down the abyss, gnashing its teeth.

Perhaps the battle between good and evil is much greater than we can possibly realize with our limited scope of *understanding*. Perhaps we are all intended to be like God; each of us having a universe of our own to raise up, adding to the numbers in battle. This is where the mystery of God remains. He has told us everything we need to know for now. This last bit, where did God come from, what does He need to increase His number for, is a mystery for the faithful. For the nonbelievers, their fate will be the same as Satan's, trapped here in this creation, to weep and gnash their teeth for eternity. What we can say for certain is that God is working to spread light and Satan is working to destroy the light. Think of what we know of the universe; all sources of light are finite. Understand and spread the infinite light.

The beginning as the end

What do we do? How do we understand what God is asking of us? We need to go back to the beginning. We need to retore the garden. When Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you,” He meant that the garden is within. The tree of life stands at the center of the soul of every believer. This is the same tree once guarded by the flaming sword, now reopened through the cross. What did God ask of us at the very beginning? He told us to care for life on Earth. He told us to name everything and live in peace with no shame and no worry. He provided everything we needed. Life for us was meant to be this simple. Consider our far distant forefathers, those early humans we look down on so often. They did not have the luxuries we have today, and they lived just as we do, eating and drinking, loving and dying. Yet now we think we cannot live without our luxuries. We need to circumcise our culture. We need to live as Adam and Eve did in the garden. Be carefree by removing excess from our lives. This is how we will help defeat evil.

But understand, God told us not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Do we take that to mean we should not know good or evil? Absolutely not! If we live in God’s Garden, we know goodness. We do not need to know evil. We can stop eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eat instead from the tree of life. Evil can be lost forever and there will be no harm to the good. Those who say one does not exist without the other, have Satan speaking for them. In the absence of darkness, there is still light. Light is the absence of darkness, just as darkness is the absence of light. One does not rely on the other to exist. Yet as God’s creation shows us, both exist. As our eating of the fruit showed us, both exist in us. Remove the darkness so the light can shine from our spirit. Understand.

Then comes the matter of how. We are at a point as a society, where we cannot simply mandate to all some set of laws to reach this. This has been our effort for too long now and is the very thing Jesus was trying to explain to the Jewish leaders of His time on Earth. God gave us ten commandments to follow, and these are the only law we need. And they can be summed up as, love each other.

Christian church, despite the harsh words in this text, you are the hope in God’s eye. He never failed to lift you up even though you did not follow the teachings of Jesus. But we should understand, this too was for God’s purpose. You extend over the

whole Earth. Recent numbers have been reported as the world having over thirty-seven million church buildings, over two and a half billion Christians, over two billion Muslims, and over fifteen million Jewish people. All of you are calling on the same God, so here is your *understanding*. Change your ways! Those Jewish people, must remove the antichrist from among themselves and finally admit that Jesus is the Christ, finally listen to the message He tried to give your forefathers. To the Muslim people, remove the falsehoods written in by your forefathers, hear the true message from Jesus as written for us by His apostles. For the Christian church, stand up! Do what you did at the start! Preach the true message. But don't just preach on Sunday mornings for an hour. You must change your structure as a whole! Invite those who call on the name of God and Jesus into your houses, your churches. The original church founders were doing this. They asked people to do what Jesus told us to do, walk away from our luxurious houses, sell our belongings and give it to the poor and needy, give it to the church so they can use it to help all have peace. If the church opens the door of its many buildings to those willing to join the movement, then a nation of priests will arise! The church needed to get large enough for this to be effective. That time has come!

Understand what this means. Governments will not change. They will continue as they always have until we give them a reason to change. Democracy was necessary for the evolution of mankind, but it is led by mankind, not God! To hell with oligarchy! Money should never lead us! Jesus told us we cannot serve both God and money. But we understand money now. It is fiat. It is nothing. It used to be metal coins, then turned into pieces of paper, and now it is nothing more than a number on a screen. Consider this, the person who cleans the floor will never be paid the same as the person who installed the floor. The person who installed the floor will never be paid the same as the person who manufactured the floor. The person who manufactured the floor will never be paid the same as the person who designed the floor. Yet all people agree that the cleaning of the floor is the most important. Why does the most important role get paid the least? The main argument to keep money in place is that it is the only way to keep things fair. Yet the format of money is inherently unfair in its overall concept. Look at the full argument the *understanding* makes against money. Why are we choosing to keep this oppression in place? We have become the Israelites under the slavery of the leader.

Do we not understand money is a construct of man and therefore within our power to destroy it? We can remove it from our creation just as easily as God can remove us from His. But we should acknowledge there is danger in this. Our whole society has encompassed money. A sudden removal of all money without worldwide *understanding* of the Word and acceptance of both God and Jesus, will cause great strife to break out. Jesus warned us of this. It is coming. We can wait until the stones fall on us and crush us. But that cannot stop us from pursuing the very purpose of our existence. We need to join the battle to eliminate evil and cutting off its money is a first step. We should stumble over the rock instead of being crushed by it. Since we know money is made up, it does not exist, it is a unicorn, we know there is a certain amount of made-up money in existence. The determination of this amount is fabricated by those who "understand" money better than others. Since there is only so much money in the bucket, we can take it and shove it down a pit and burn it. If all who desire to follow Jesus, sold all they have and gave the money to the church, it would be more than enough to pay the properties off, pay the taxes, get the housing situated, get the gardens started, and the rest can be burned so that it may never return to the original set amount of money in existence. Show the fiat state of money by disrupting the world's money pot. We need to start a new form of government led by God!

Think about it this way, Jesus was correct, we have 666 on our hands and our foreheads. We keep doing what we've always done, and we see what it is causing both to our values of goodness and to the Earth itself. We have built a society where there is no escape for any individual who reaches this *understanding*. Jesus is not here for us to follow in person. If any of us were to sell all our belongings and walk away, where would we go? We would walk the street and be treated no differently from the way we treat the homeless currently. There is no place to go. If we want to help spread the Word, there is nothing stopping us, except the threat of not having shelter from the storm, not having food, not having water, and we should mention, not having an audience. There is no temple for us to sit outside preaching. There is no one to care for us as we do God's work.

The church has become a business which we cannot follow. So, Christian church, prepare the way! In the desert, prepare the way, make straight the path in the wilderness. Change your business model to be a spiritual one. But in so doing, remove the mysticism from yourself, you know it's wrong! Open the door to Jesus, open the door

of the churches for those who wish to follow Jesus. Be the true Christians the apostles taught you to be. Stand up against the government. We must still abide by the laws mankind has created. This does not mean we can't change them. But we must work through them in order to constitute change. You can no longer sit back with your fishing lines in the water waiting for a bite. The time has come to change from fishers of men to hunters. Become the wolves, working together as a pack. Create a path for others to follow. *Understand* these things so that you can help others *understand* and see how the yeast of truth mixes. The demons asked Jesus if He was here to torment them before the appointed time. Even the demons knew this time was coming. The time to torment them is now.

The church will need help. Governmental laws and regulations are far beyond those of the past. It isn't as simple as standing before the Sanhedrin and pleading your case. Living in God's ways will still require structure just like it did in the past. Moses helped us to know how to build this structure. Each will have a role in the community, and each role will care for the others. That is how it is intended. This is the way to be the true salt. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, carpenters, farmers, engineers, and yes even accountants will be needed among others. But stop thinking it is impossible to come out of Babylon! The time has come to come out of her, all God's people. All current members of the church are skilled in one way or another. Bring your value with you and join! But only if the church changes its ways will this be possible.

It starts with adults. But as Jesus told us, it is the children who hold the true hope. We must teach our children the purpose of God's creation. Many who do reach this *understanding*, reach it much later in life. Imagine if all children were taught this from the youngest age. We are all God's children. Each of us, new to life, as a child of God, learning from our Father. This is the same way we should treat our children, with love, compassion, *understanding*, and forgiveness. But teach the children who their real Father is, our Father in heaven. Once the church has prepared the way for us, we can then prepare the way for our future generations. But it starts with the adults. We can *understand* all these things, we can change, and we can brighten the future for our children.

When our children ask where they came from, we know they came from the joining of flesh to flesh. This is what we teach them. It is science, it is true, but we need to

also teach them where all of us came from. We have traced it back to the very beginning of time and cannot answer how something comes from nothing. God told Moses to say His name is "I am". This is the same answer. We can't say where God came from any more than we can say where the universe came from. Just because we can't say where the universe came from doesn't mean we are saying it doesn't exist. The same goes for God. This is a mystery of God we cannot know while we are here. But it is an answer we know how to get- live righteously, love God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves, then we will be given new life after our time on Earth ends and we will be one with God in heaven. Then we will have our answers to this. God is. There is no debate here. This, our children must learn. All other teachings are still important, math, science, social studies, history, reading, and writing, these hold value. Lack of knowledge is the greatest hinderance to *understanding*. But the most important teaching is that of God and our purpose here. It must be taught with priority. Give the children not only food, water, and shelter, but feed their spirits.

If the church opens its doors, the people who live in the cities will need housing and should find it in the church. The people who live in rural areas on some amount of land, should be supported by the church to keep their land and they should house the overflow from the church buildings, and their land should be worked to care for the Christian community as a whole. The money received from selling their homes in the city, their property, and their belongings should be given to the church. Over the course of time, the church will gain enough money and position to return to the promised land. Not fighting over it between Jew, Muslim, and Christian, but living together there as true followers of Jesus, living in His name. This is the promise God made to Abraham! Remember Ezekiel's temple vision. We are the temple. Then we can build Ezekiel's temple following the instruction God provided and learn the other aspects which we still do not understand. As Jesus told us, the kingdom of God is in us. We must each repent of our ways by changing our actions and bring about the kingdom from within us!

Don't be mistaken in pride when this comes to pass. Many will not change. Many will never hear or see these words and will continue in the practice of evil ways. Money will not be destroyed, although it will be hindered. The rest of the world will continue on, but they will see how well the Christian community is living and they will gnash their teeth. The fight will come. The time will come that the way of wicked living will

continue to bring ruin to them. They will reach a point of desperation and will come to take from the Christians. Do not fear this! It is inevitable and Jesus has already told us it will happen. He will not let the Christian community be destroyed. Yes, we will be bringing about a terrible day when this happens. The day of the Lord is not something we should look forward to. But the defeat of evil for all time is!

This writing is not done with the intention of gaining money. But let's be realistic, what other method in today's time is there for sharing the true *understanding*. If it were released on the internet, then the only way to access it would be those who have internet access, not to mention the many ways it would be hacked, changed, distorted, and misrepresented, and the money involved in the upkeep and promotion of the website. It could be posted to social media, but the same concern with it being tampered with would exist, not to mention this would require everyone to have social media accounts, this should not be- considering how social media is used at the time of this writing, and there is the money involved in promotion here as well. It could be read in stadiums, but what stadium would allow it without the involvement of money? It could be read in churches, but then the audience is limited. It should be read in churches. It could be read up and down the streets, but who has time to stop and listen? Therefore, publication is the right first step as it will ensure the words have not been compromised and there is no way in our current society to avoid the involvement of money. But we should try. God willing, it will be spread far and wide. There is no reason the funds from this writing can't be used to help initiate the change within the church.

Despite the attempts to traditionally publish this writing, to the time of this passage, none from the publishing industry have been willing to take on this project. Therefore, in order to ensure this writing is not swept away, I will be releasing it digitally, free to all in every way I can.

To further on this, I hereby commit- that all proceeds which may, in the future, come from this writing will be given to the church, if and when the church changes and finally begins doing what it was intended to in the first place. This is the call from God to wake up! When the time comes, purchase this writing in large numbers knowing you are devoting it to the real and true Christian Church. No one person should profit from God's word, but if money is generated, it should be committed to God's purpose. Consider it a vote to place God as our leader. Watch and see what God will

do! Buy it in large numbers and hand it out everywhere! Place it in our schools, put it in every church, deliver it to those who are unable to get it themselves. When the church changes and the money is handed over, all who wish to join in following Jesus will have everything they need and more! Find faith! Understand! Begin the exodus and watch the beast and the prostitute weep and gnash their teeth! If no money is ever generated from this writing, God will find a way to support the new church. Find faith!

Woe, to any publishing company which denied this truth! You deny God!

Christian church, in the Spirit of the Lord, make correction according to His plan, or He will correct the path of His purpose!

For the rest of us who are zealous for this change, be patient, 42! Understand God's timeline and allow it to proceed as it must. Be patient as we endure. Hope is on the horizon!

God is. We will die. These are truths. Time gives us unity. It is one thing we all share. Not just time, but the physical existence which time stems from. That time is coming to a close. When the day of judgement comes, each of us will rise from our slumber and stand in judgement. What will you have to say when this day comes? For me, I will say, "Lord, I thank you for giving me life. I thank you for the opportunity you have given me to join as one with Jesus therefore joining as one with you. Forgive the sins of my youth. I was misled by many. Not that I am excusing myself from my own sin, you know I am a sinner, but so that you will know the level of my *understanding*, I say that I was misled by many. Forgive the previous generations as they did not *understand*. I struggled with the devil, Lord, you know he was with me from my childhood. He taunted me and threw me from your path many times. It is by your grace alone that I was able to *understand* all these things and knowing this, I worked to share this *understanding*. I realize that reaching this *understanding* of good and evil was the intent of my life, but since you blessed me with this *understanding* and I still woke up the next day, I know it was with the intention that I still had work to do. So, you made a change within me, and I made effort to do your work. You know I prayed to you every day saying, 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name- I am. Your kingdom come, meaning- your will be done, on Earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread- that which feeds the spirit. Forgive us our trespasses as we

forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Guide my hands, Lord, and let your words flow from me in everything I do. Protect me from the ways of mankind so that I might focus on doing your work. I ask these things in Jesus' name because you know I am not worthy Lord. You know my heart.' Lord, I have much to account for in the way of sin, you know these. I hope that you have seen enough good in me to allow grace in your judgement of me. If, Lord, you determine that I have sinned too greatly and therefore will be cast out where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, then I gladly volunteer to be the first to go, but I would ask that it in some way brings glory to your name. In this way, you know even more of my heart. I wish only to lift your name in glory on high."

After reading all of this, if you still are struggling to understand God, ask yourself this question: Where does love come from? When the apostle John was so old he had to be helped to stand before crowds, he would say three words to the crowd, "Love each other." This is the only law we need, and it enlightens us to all sin. Love comes from a bond. A mother and child have this bond from the moment of conception. We can also build this bond as we do in our personal relationships. God loves us as a Father loves their children. We should follow Jesus' law and love God and each other. We must build the bond of love.

Adam and Eve were created before mankind, then cast out of the garden to live with mankind. Cain killed Abel and was separated. Cain started the Behemoth which led to the leviathan, the wicked shepherd was raised along with us. But it will have no power if we stop feeding its beasts. Adam and his other sons first taught people about God. So, God created all things, then sent Adam and Eve with the knowledge of good and evil into the world to teach all of us about God. That was the first seed. It produced a plant which grew and created more seeds. This seed has been spreading since the beginning. This is God's Word. Since that time, we have been learning, but we still have not seen. We are all God's children. Both Cain and Abel! The battle between good and evil has been in place since the very beginning. Forgive Cain and remove Satan's blasphemy from God's Behemoth and Leviathan! We need to build our bond as siblings and finally listen to our Father! We need to love each other and honor our Father! Jesus spread this very seed.

We need to understand the sin of Adam and Eve. Our desire is the core of our sin. The desire, which is the sin of Adam and Eve, brings new life. This is something God wants from us. All other sin is against life and therefore, is wicked and should not be. We are here to not only preserve life, but to create life. God has tried telling us that in order to do this, we must *understand* what it means to be Lord. God wants us to understand the sin which goes beyond the sin of Adam and Eve so that we can rightly discern what fits his goodness and what feeds wickedness. We must reach an *understanding* of the path of sin.

We must understand what God asked of Abraham. He has already provided the promised Lamb. But more than that, Abraham made that sacrifice for us and we no longer need to sacrifice our children. We must be willing to rather, devote our children to the Lord! God provided the Lamb so our children can live a righteous life. We must learn from Abraham to now devote our children to the Lord! Adults- turn your hearts to our children, and children- turn your hearts to our Father!

We must understand Jacob's ladder. We must wrestle with both men and God and overcome! It is part of our youthful learning, despite physical age. Stop drawing lines in the road as Jacob's uncle did, even over something as useless as a statue. Find a way to focus our lives on the righteousness God wants us to walk in. Share livestock, be communal on an equal level. Stop working toward the "best" marbled slab of meat to eat, killing in mass numbers. Understand that life is life regardless; all plants, animals, humans, even the Earth herself is alive. Don't we see how the plants drop food for us? Remember the manna in the desert. The plants die and cycle as they should. Mother Earth is amazing as she bares herself on one side at the same time, she bears her fruit on the other! We have resources to ensure all on the Earth have food.

We must learn from Joshua to share food with all in need. But learn from the outcome, that we cannot let money stop the hungry from eating. Nor can we allow hunger to bring about oppression. We must learn from Moses. We must stand up in God's strength to stop the wicked oppression. Understand that money is modern slavery. All humans must live free of oppression! Moses not only teaches us the way to be freed, but he also teaches us how to set up a society where all have free will and yet all contribute to the community based on each person's- skills, interests, and knowledge base. We should use our large structures which are already in place to hold public

gatherings. It's important to come together and meet as communities. We must understand the needs of others and assist them.

We must learn from Job. We must know that everything has happened to serve God's purpose, both what we believe is good and what we deem is bad. God does not make us suffer in vain.

We must learn from King David. We must solidify the Christian community, but not with violence as it was in David's time. We must find a way to solidify legally without bringing about war. Remember what God told us the king we wanted would do to us. We must learn from both the judges and the kings. We must *understand* Daniel's message related to the warring king of the north and the king of the south, fighting back and forth relentlessly. There should be no leader other than God Himself!

We must *understand* the sign of Jonah. That is the only sign we have. We must respond to the message in the same way Ninevah did when they heard Jonah's message.

We must not just understand Daniel or Jonah's message, we must *understand* all of the true prophet's messages! Words come and go as language shifts. The book of Enoch, which was not included in this exegesis, yet belongs with the other books of the Bible, tells us how God hates writing. The reason for this is that words come and go over time as more is named. Remember God tasked Adam with naming everything. We continue to do this today. But as language improves, words are added, and in the process of this, written words lose their intended symbolism over time. Understand that a letter is a symbol used to represent a sound. Combinations of letters are used to create words, which then make a complex sound. A simple example is the word "tree". A combination of four letters which form a word that symbolizes a plant with a wooden base, roots in the ground, and a leafy top. Over the course of time, some words held different meanings when they were first used versus the modern-day use of the word. We have discovered this as we needed to understand the symbolism of God's Word in order to reach a full *understanding*. And this is the very reason the Bible has sat in the middle of the road, both witnesses dead, for three days, in God's time as we should understand it now. Revive the Bible, lift it to heaven through *understanding*!

We must learn from Jesus! The Word came to us, although we did not recognize Him! Awaken the Word and celebrate the birth of Jesus every day, bringing the kingdom into being! Keep Christmas if we must; but not as a holiday to celebrate, instead keep it as a memorial of how lost our *understanding* was. Instead of decorating our houses on this day, remove the excess on this day. Empty our houses of the things we don't need, giving them to those who need them. Share them communally across the world and see how much we already have. Understand Jesus' message to us, the way to be perfect is to learn, as long as it takes. It is a time of trial, 40 years symbolically. Learn also from Jesus, the children are the greatest, and they must be our collective priority! We must preserve knowledge and build it up. We must teach children about God first, then all other knowledge, followed by wisdom which will lead to *understanding*, bringing about righteous discernment. Teach children at their pace. Stop running schools based on money. Communities must teach children collectively. We exchange money for knowledge. It's foolish. Knowledge cannot be monetized. Why are we holding others back? Money has now oppressed knowledge. Release it!

Our science may never know the answer to the beginning, but our science will be capable of bringing life to the entire universe. Medical science is a great thing, except that we use it to lie about our appearance and in pursuit of money we poison ourselves and have seen the way we are destroying our DNA, yet we don't admit to it. All medical personnel everywhere should come together to fix all ailments. Aren't we all saying that it's possible, but hindering the progress in pursuit of money? In the process of refining our knowledge and the way we should use the technology available to us, we must remember not to let wickedness creep back in- Balam who taught Balack to entice the Israelites to sin. Remove the symbolically stated Asherah poles from among us. Rip up the neighborhood streets and replace them all with gardens. Watch how mother nature provides for us.

Stop using precious gems to adorn ourselves and give it all to science. Not to be wasted on useless satellites, transferring money back and forth. We're already fighting over who owns outer space. God is the rightful owner of all that is! But we should take science slowly, understand every detail and rightly discern every decision. When all people on the Earth work together, it will be wonderful. God's creation contains many animals, and all life matters. Learn to live alongside the animals, no longer ruling over

them. We return to the beginning, but maintain our God given purpose and powers to create and sustain life. The animals will help us when we live alongside them.

It can be a simple yet mature life. But don't be mistaken, the path to this life is like that of the Israelites in the desert. This generation is not worthy. We will start with very little, eating wafers so to speak. But we must endure for future generations.

We see in all of this, how money must go down the abyss in order for us to begin living in all God's ways. God allowed money so that we might grow and learn, but he is ready for money to go down the abyss taking the beasts with it. Jesus revealed this to us. It will not be destroyed. Jesus wants to flip the tables and wipe it all clean, and he will. But first, those who *understand* must gather to show God we *understand,* we repent, we commit to God as in marriage. Then God will act to protect His people. He will wipe away the wicked and the corrupt for all time and make a new Heaven and Earth without wickedness. One with only those who *understand* and preserve life. Those mysteries will be given to the worthy at the time of judgement. The wicked, those who do not value life, will be destroyed. They will be cast out, but will see the Kingdom, and will weep and gnash their teeth forever.

Now there are many plants, the time has come to ripen our fruit! Come together as one following in God's ways and see what amazing things are in store for us! We aim to terraform other planets, yet we have not put effort into restoring our own. We are capable of doing this, both saving our world, and bringing life to other worlds. As we learned through the story of creation, the Earth was the first. But the truth is, if we continue as we are, we will not survive long enough to spread life through the universe. Know what it means to be Lord. At the start, we imagined God in whatever way we wanted, now we should understand God as a collective. There is only one way to join that collective, remove the excess from our lives, repent of our actions, change our ways, thereby removing the suffering of Satan and welcoming the kingdom of God. If we truly live as one together, then God and Jesus will live with us as one. The parable of the Earth. Understand!

In the same way that we returned to the beginning when we reached the end, we should do the same with our reading of the Word. Once we have reached an *understanding* of the truth, upon reading again, we find it ever more enlightening. We must

understand the beginning to *understand* the end. And we must *understand* the end to *understand* the beginning. God is- The Beginning and the End.

This text is in no way intended to replace the words of the Bible, it is only intended to serve as a counselor, guiding to the spirit of truth, and lifting the Bible to Heaven. This *understanding* should be joined in bondage to the Bible so that all may *understand* and change their hearts.

Seek wisdom, and you will find it. Seek *understanding*, and it will rise like a dawn within you. The same light that shined at creation, the same Word that walked among us still speaks. The story never ended; it continues in everyone who chooses to *understand*.

God gave the first covenant to Noah. This one was God's promise to uphold us. Abraham agreed to the second covenant for all people. This one was our promise to uphold God. God gave the third covenant to Moses. This one was a shared promise- we committed to follow God's law and God committed to protect us. Jesus intended to help us *understand* what our part in that covenant has been all along.

The time has come for a new covenant and let our love for each other be the ark which protects it and strengthens our bond with our Lord. Finally upholding our promise. The full circle begins when wisdom returns to its source: love.

The name given to me at the time of my birth is David. I am a servant of the Lord our God, a slave to Jesus, and I testify that all these words are truth.

Christian church, the hosts of heaven await you. Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement approaches. Worship Him who made the heavens, the Earth, the sea, and the springs of water.

Will you reach *understanding*?