

free

TWELVE TRIBES FREEPAPER

BENYAMIN

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head." —Revelation 12:1

Spring 2007

THE STIRRING OF THE HEART

*Where did the
gospel come from?*



The Beating of a Heart

Shhh... listen for a moment: *lub-dub, lub-dub*

Can you hear it? Put your hand to your heart — just about at the center of your chest. Can you feel your heart beating? The first organ formed, it begins beating after just three weeks. As an adult, on the average your heart valves are opening and closing 75 times per minute. Its tempo rises and falls with the swells of the tides of life — sometimes it beats faster, sometimes slower.

Your heart beats about 100,000 times in a single day and about 40 million times in a year. During your lifetime, your heart will beat more than 2.5 billion times. The heart works hard, even at rest — twice as hard as the leg muscles of a person sprinting. Your six quarts of blood are being circulated throughout your body three times every minute. In a single day, your blood travels over 12,000 miles (four times the distance across the United States from coast to coast). During your lifetime, your heart will have pumped the equivalent of one million barrels of blood — enough to fill more than three oil supertankers. The heart truly is an amazing muscle. It beats, without stopping, for an entire lifetime. Your circumstances and surroundings may change, yet still the heart beats regularly, steadily, without conscious control or notice on your part.

Sometimes, though, you become consciously and acutely aware of your own heart beating. It may be an unfamiliar or unpleasant sensation. Your pulse is quickened, but it is not caused by excessive exercise or stress or strong emotion. Your heart pounds, seemingly about to burst in your chest cavity, the heartbeat echoing in your ears. What is that arrhythmic, fluttering sensation? It is a rare experience not felt by all. Something is tugging on your heart strings. Your heart is being stirred up, not by any natural cause, but by a greater power. You are being roused to action.

Down through the centuries, men have experienced this tug upon the heart as they have groped for God. A man named Abram felt it on a clear, starry night as he stood looking up toward the heavens in the middle of ancient Mesopotamia. Some of his descendants felt it in the wilderness outside of Egypt as they prepared the tabernacle of worship for the God of Israel. A relative few again felt it when their time of captivity in Babylon was at an end as they returned to rebuild the temple and walls of Jerusalem.

Five hundred years after that, a Man came with an uncompromising message of love that demanded complete surrender and trust from the heart. A few whose hearts were simple and tender enough to be stirred by His message left behind everything and followed Him. Others, mostly of the ruling religious establishment, hardened their hearts and plotted to have this kind, gentle Man killed.

After His torturous execution, some returned to the city, beating their chests — a physical expression of what was happening within their hearts. After His triumphant resurrection and victory over death, His followers preached the message of a new life, and three thousand of their countrymen were pierced to the heart. Recognizing the guilt they shared in that innocent Man's death, they were immersed, being washed of their guilt and reborn into a new life.

Such was the beginning of the most vibrant, heart-warming community life of togetherness. Yet after the span of only forty or fifty years, their once-bright light began flickering and eventually was snuffed out. The heartbeat could no longer be found.

About thirty-five years ago, in the height of the Jesus Movement, it was a time when many were seeking to be rid of stale religious rote. Many people's hearts were stirred then, and Christian communities were springing up all around the country. But only a few years later, when the dust settled, most only ended up back in the pews.

Once again, there is a stirring in the hearts of a people. There is hope once again of living a sold-out, gung-ho, 24/7 life of a disciple doing God's will. We who write this paper for you hope that you will find encouragement and hope in the things that you read. And, as always, we warmly invite you to come and visit us. We would love to get to know you. ☘



THE STIRRING OF THE HEART



Those whose hearts were stirred to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem had to forsake the comforts and security of their former lives. Is the call of the Gospel any different today?



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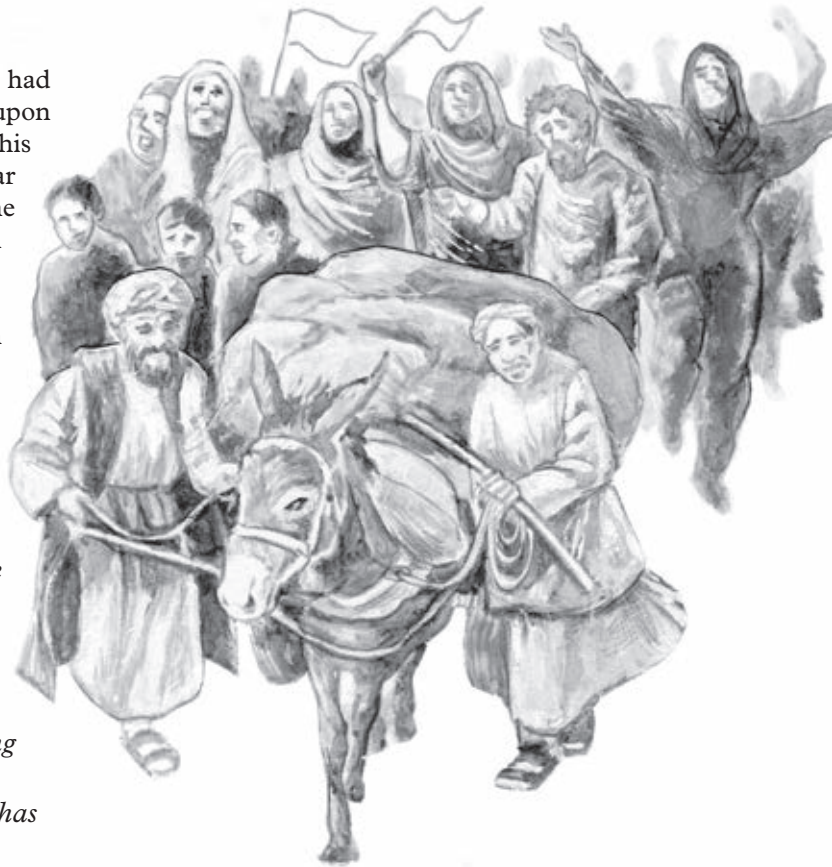
What does the return of the Jews from Babylon, and Abraham's call to leave Ur and go to the Promised Land have to do with the Gospel? EVERYTHING!

By the Waters of Babylon

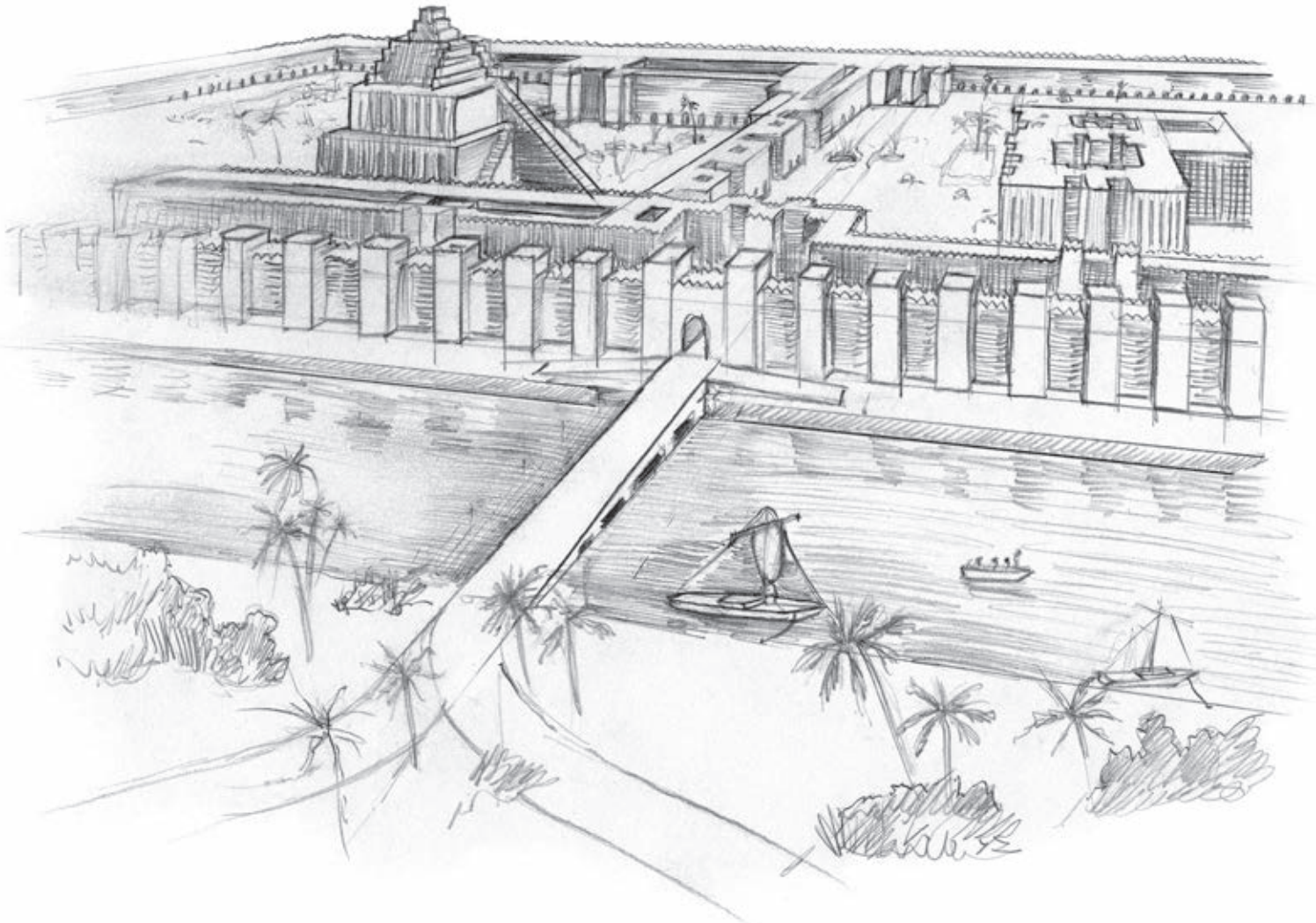
For forty years, the “weeping prophet” Jeremiah had warned his people of the judgment that was coming upon them for their idolatry and rebellion, but few heeded his message. When the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon finally surrounded and laid siege to the city in 586 BC, it was too late to repent. Jerusalem was laid waste, the Temple destroyed, and all but the poorest survivors were carried away to Babylon where Jeremiah had prophesied they would remain for 70 years.

But Jeremiah had also given them the hope of returning to their land when their time of discipline was over, and it is thrilling to read of the Persian conquest of Babylon at the end of those 70 years, and their release from captivity by King Cyrus:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel — He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-3)



What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy! You can go on to read of their return to rebuild the Temple, followed by the exciting story of how Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the city walls in only 52 days, despite intense opposition. It would be quite reasonable to envision



The sad truth is that more than 95% preferred the comforts of their life in Babylon to the sufferings of returning and rebuilding Jerusalem.

all the exiles bursting forth from their long captivity to return to their beloved city and rebuild her walls and restore her former glory.

But a closer look at history reveals the shocking fact that there were about one million Jews living in Babylon at the end of their 70-year exile, and fewer than 50,000 returned to Jerusalem. Less than 5 percent! Why did so few respond? The sad truth is that more than 95 percent preferred the comforts of their life in Babylon to the sufferings of returning and rebuilding Jerusalem¹ and restoring the life of God in the one place on earth He had chosen for His name to dwell.²

As one historian put it, after arriving in the land of their exile, "... they forged a new national identity and a new religion."³

In the first foray, the Babylonians did not destroy the Temple, nor send the Jews into exile. However, they did succeed in taking into captivity 10,000 of the best and brightest Jews. While it seemed like a terrible disaster at the time, these brilliant men, Torah scholars all, immediately established a Jewish infrastructure upon arrival in Babylon. A dozen years later when the Temple was destroyed, the Jews who were exiled to Babylon found there yeshivas, synagogues, kosher butchers, etc., all the essentials for maintaining a Jewish life...⁴

¹ Rabbi Ken Spiro, "Crash Course in Jewish History #24 – Purim in Persia," <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory>. See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (11.8).

² Deuteronomy 12:13-14; 16:2,5,6; Nehemiah 1:8-9; 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21

³ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Exile.html>

⁴ Ken Spiro, "Crash Course in Jewish History #43 – Jews in Babylon," <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory>

Only 42,000?

In Ezra 2:64, it says of those exiles returning to Jerusalem, “The whole assembly numbered 42,360.” Forty-two thousand initially sounds like a lot of people, enough to fill a medium-sized stadium. However, the fact that there were *over a million* Jews in Babylon at that time brings the number into proper perspective.

Usually, the words *only* or *merely*, when inserted in italics by Bible translators, are diluting words, used to reduce the impact, or qualify what was written.¹ However, in this case, either word could rightly have been inserted by the translators in this verse. It may as well have read, “The whole assembly numbered *only* 42,360.” *Only* forty-two thousand had their hearts stirred as Ezra 1:5 describes. *Only* forty-two thousand returned to Jerusalem. That’s *barely* 4% of the total number living in Babylon at that time.

Why did so few return to their ancestral homeland? The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that most of them were “loath to leave” due to the homes, possessions, and security they had achieved during their 70 years of captivity.² Many had achieved status and even great wealth during their stay in the prosperous Babylonian capital. In fact, most were downright comfortable — so comfortable, in fact, that they may well have sneered or groaned when the call came to return to their land and rebuild the temple.

By their response, it was clear that their comfort was what really mattered to most of the ones who stayed behind.

¹ Such as in Philippians 2:4 (compare the New Revised Standard Version with most other translations).

² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.3



... all except the Temple sacrifices, that is, which were their only means of being forgiven of their sins. Thus the *synagogue* was born to soothe the guilty consciences of a people banished from their land for their rebellion and idolatry, while their sins piled up as high as heaven. Once a week, they would gather to be led through a ritual of psalms, prayers, and readings from the Law which they had spurned and the Prophets which they had ignored. At first they mourned, as the psalmist wrote:

*By the waters of Babylon, there
we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.*

*On the willows there we
hung up our harps.*

*For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors,
mirth, saying, “Sing us
one of the songs of Zion!”*

*How shall we sing Yahweh’s
song in a foreign land?*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand
forget its skill!*

*Let my tongue stick to
the roof of my mouth,*

if I do not remember you,

*if I do not set Jerusalem above my
highest joy! (Psalm 137:1-6)*



But somewhere along the way they stopped mourning, and moved on to making the most of their circumstances. Indeed, their fertile flocks, fruitful fields, and financial finesse carved out a comfortable niche for them in the land of their captivity. They built more schools and more synagogues that nurtured a new generation who were quite content with a mythical Jerusalem and a mystical religion far removed from the simple faith of their father Abraham who had left that very land so long ago.



They carved out a comfortable niche in the land of their captivity.

The Faith of Abraham

Abraham had looked up at the very same stars that shone over their heads, longing to know the One who had filled the expanse of heaven with such glory, and longing to know the purpose for his existence. He was not content with the rich life of Ur, nestled in the fertile floodplain of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, or even Haran where his family settled for a time. That is why his heart could be stirred by the Spirit of his Creator, and that is why he had ears to hear the voice that said, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”⁵

How fond and tender must have been the farewells of Abraham as he kissed his loved ones goodbye forever, placed his life in the care of his God, and set his face toward an unknown land! Abraham did not shrink back from leaving all behind — family, friends, and material security — to follow that voice to the land of promise. His faith caused him to obey God.

1,500 years later, that same voice called out to Abraham’s wayward offspring to leave that same land of worldly comfort and return to the same



⁵ Genesis 12:1

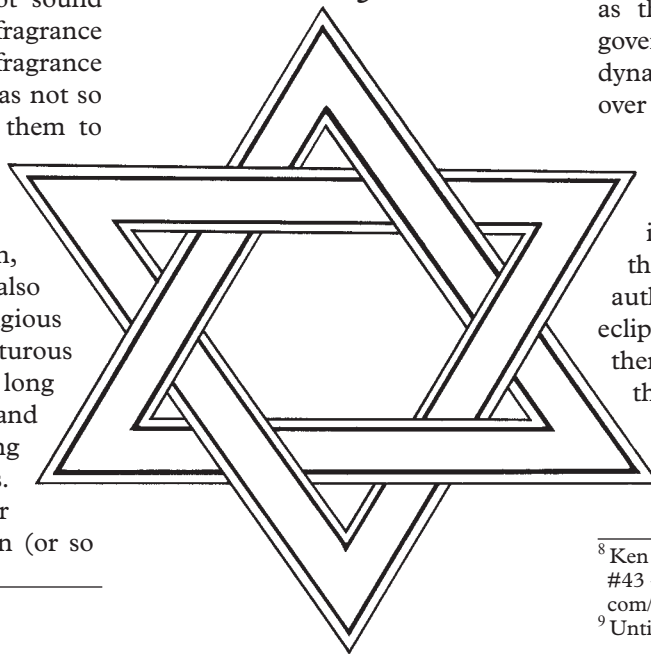


land of heavenly promise, but only a few responded — only those whose hearts could still be stirred.⁶ And just as Abraham, they left everything behind to follow that voice — family, friends, possessions, plans, comfort, and security — in order to restore the desolate heritage of Abraham and redeem the name of his God.

To the rest — almost a million Jews — the good news of release from their captivity did not sound so good. In fact, it was the fragrance of death to them, not the fragrance of life.⁷ Surely, their God was not so unreasonable as to expect them to *literally* leave everything they had worked so hard to establish, since He had so obviously blessed them, not only materially, but also with a rich social and religious life. It was fine for the adventurous few to risk their lives on a long and dangerous journey, and wear themselves out trying to restore what lay in ruins. But they could worship their God just as well in Babylon (or so

they thought), and in their hearts they would take identity with their zealous brothers in Jerusalem, and send them offerings. After all, who would finance the work if they were all so reckless as to leave everything for which they had labored?

The Jews established a new “Davidic Dynasty” in Babylon.



The New Religion of the Jews

So it was that the new religion of Judaism (not to be confused with the obedient faith of Abraham) continued to flourish in the land of Babylon, its spiritual center, independent of the restored Temple worship in Jerusalem. They even chose their own ruler from the line of King David who, although he was not called a king, was recognized as their nobleman by the Persian government.⁸ This new “Davidic dynasty” continued in Babylon for over 1,500 years.⁹ By the end of that time, their rabbinic academy had compiled every jot and tittle of their new religion into what became known as the *Babylonian Talmud*, the most authoritative document of Judaism, eclipsing even the Torah itself. To them, only through the lens of their published commentaries could the Torah be properly understood and applied.

⁶ Ezra 1:3,5

⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:16

⁸ Ken Spiro, “Crash Course in Jewish History #43 – Jews in Babylon,” <http://www.aish.com/literacy/jewishhistory>

⁹ Until about 1000 AD.

WHERE DID THE GOSPEL COME FROM?

The Jewish religion that had incubated in Babylon was inevitably carried back to Jerusalem by the courageous few who returned, so that even after the Temple was rebuilt and the ministry of the Levitical priesthood restored, what emanated from it was at best a diluted mixture — a few parts Abraham’s faith and many parts “essence of Babylon.” Five hundred years later, at the dawn of the first century AD, all that remained was lifeless ritual and a handful of faithful men and women suffering under the control of a religious elite who had carved out a comfortable niche for themselves under Roman rule.

Virtual Babylon

Under Roman rule the Jews were effectively exiles in their own land, a virtual Babylon, where they were allowed to practice their religion as long as it was no threat to their overlords. And it was no threat as long as there were no prophets stirring up the people and reminding them of who they were supposed to be and what they were supposed to do as God’s holy people. The last true prophet of Israel had been Malachi, over 400 years earlier, who had denounced their corrupt priesthood and the lame sacrifices being offered up in the Temple only a few decades after its restoration, expressing the cry of God’s heart:

“Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name will be great among

the nations,” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:10-11)

It was a shocking thing to say, seemingly contradicting the clear instruction given in the Law that the priestly sacrifices could only be offered up in the one place their God had caused His name to dwell, namely in Jerusalem.¹⁰ It was a “wake up” call to what was left of the holy nation, letting them know that if they didn’t repent He would look elsewhere for a holy people — beyond the borders of Israel.¹¹ He would do exactly what Moses himself had prophesied:

“They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” (Deuteronomy 32:21)¹²

Malachi went on to speak of a messenger who would come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah. That messenger was John the Baptist, who had these opening words for the descendants of the corrupt priests of Malachi’s day:

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:7-10)

John merely spoke the plain truth: Even though they were physically in the land and offering sacrifices in the Temple, spiritually they were just as far removed from the life and heart of God as if they were still in Babylon. Their lame sacrifices were not accepted and their sins were piling up to heaven. The sharp rebuke sent shivers through the sensitive few who hated the religious hypocrisy and economic injustice all around them. Their hearts were stirred by this prophet, and they longed for the Messiah whom John said would soon appear to bring the remedy.

The Remedy

It is impossible to understand the purpose of Messiah’s coming, the meaning of His message, and the significance of His death and resurrection apart from the condition of Israel at that time, how it came to be that way, and how it was supposed to be. He did not come to provide a free ticket to heaven, but to redeem a people for His own possession who would do His Father’s will on the earth. And that will had not changed.¹³ His will was still the same as it had been for Abraham coming out of Ur, and for the twelve tribes coming out of Egypt, and for the Jews coming out of Babylon: that He would have a dwelling place in a holy people who would be a light to the nations¹⁴ around them, showing them what He is really like by their love for one another.

As the prophet Isaiah put it, God wanted His people to be like a vineyard bearing the fruit of justice and righteousness.¹⁵ In fact, in the last few days before the crucifixion, after driving the money-changers

¹³ Malachi 3:6

¹⁴ Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 58:8,10; 60:3; Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 13:47 (“you” is plural in all these verses; it is the corporate light of a holy people)

¹⁵ Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:6

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 12:13-14; 16:2,5,6; 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21

¹¹ Malachi 1:5

¹² Romans 10:19; 11:11-14; 1 Peter 2:9-10

out of the Temple courts, Yahshua¹⁶ retold Isaiah's parable of the vineyard to the chief priests and elders,¹⁷ recounting Israel's repeated rebellion and extending it to how they would soon treat Him. Then He ended the story with the ringing judgment:

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." (Matthew 21:43)

He went on to deliver a scathing condemnation of the fallen religious system in seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees, and to prophesy the utter destruction of the Temple.¹⁸ At that point, they began to make plans to arrest Him. In demanding His crucifixion, they called a curse upon themselves and their children,¹⁹ which has faithfully followed them down through the subsequent centuries.

But who was the nation to whom the kingdom of God would be given, which was expected to bear the fruit of it? Did these words of the Messiah have anything to do with the gospel or "good news" of the kingdom that He had been preaching since His baptism,²⁰ and which He said His disciples would also be preaching?

"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14)

And could it have anything to do with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 49:6?

"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make You as a

light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

Since He told His disciples that *everything* written about Him in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled,²¹ where and when was this prophecy fulfilled? Later, the apostle Paul quoted this very passage in support of his ministry,²² and he also spoke of it in his defense before King Agrippa:

"And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!" (Acts 26:6-7)

Paul was in trouble with the Jews because the gospel he preached was raising up a twelve-tribed spiritual Israel²³ from among the *Gentiles*,²⁴



²¹ Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44-45

²² Acts 13:47

²³ Isaiah 49:6; Ephesians 2:12; Galatians 3:29; 6:16

²⁴ Acts 13:46 — Paul's fervent hope was to move his fellow Jews to jealousy (Romans 10:19; 11:13-15; Deuteronomy 32:21), so that they would someday repent (Zechariah 12:10) and God could righteously fulfill His promise to give them the land, enemy-free, in the next age (Genesis 15:18-21; Luke 1:72-75).

beyond the borders of the land of Israel.²⁵ It was exactly what Yahshua, the Messiah, had said would happen — the kingdom would be taken away from the Jews and given to a nation that would bear its fruit.²⁶ And it would happen as a result of the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

"This doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven, which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought."

~ H. G. Wells²⁷

You may never have thought of the gospel as having anything to do with raising up a twelve-tribed nation in the midst of the nations of the earth to be a light to them. And you may never have considered that the gospel had anything to do with the Jews having been called out of Babylon to re-establish the physical nation of Israel. But in reality, the gospel that Yahshua and His apostles preached had *everything* to do with *both*.

Yahshua came to call His people out of Babylon to rebuild the Temple and restore the walls of Jerusalem. Of course, it was not the historical Babylon or the physical temple and city walls, but rather the spiritual realities that they represented. However, *spiritual* does not mean *mystical* or *invisible*. The building materials were *spiritual* men and women, and the building was both visible and tangible, as the following verses describe:

So the Jews said to Him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this

²⁵ Malachi 1:5,11

²⁶ Matthew 21:43

²⁷ H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, vol. 1, p. 422 (1961)

¹⁶ *Yahshua* is the Hebrew name of the Messiah; see "The Name Above all Names" on page 47 for more about this.

¹⁷ Matthew 21:33-40

¹⁸ Matthew 23:1-39; 24:2

¹⁹ Matthew 27:25

²⁰ Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15

WHERE DID THE GOSPEL COME FROM?

temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking about the temple of His Body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-22)

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its

radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel... And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:9-14)

But where did the building materials come from, and how were they gathered? The foundation stones came from the “Babylon” that Israel had become, and they were gathered in the same way that the Jews had been gathered out of Babylon of old: Those whose hearts were stirred by the good news that it was time to restore the dwelling place of God on the earth forsook everything to follow the One who was leading the way. They left family, friends, careers, and possessions to follow Yahshua, responding immediately to His call:

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James



the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

That same response was required of all who would follow Him, a fact which even took His first disciples by surprise when they heard His command to a wealthy, religious young man who was seeking eternal life:

And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You

lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God...”

And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Who then can be saved?” Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”

Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or wife or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:21-30)

Just as surely as it was impossible for anyone to obey the call to rebuild the Temple while remaining in Babylon (or even to drag his possessions and his unwilling family members along with him on the arduous 700-mile journey to Jerusalem), so it was impossible to follow the Messiah without forsaking one’s life in this world, with all of its material and emotional trappings. And just as back then, most were

unwilling to give up their comfort and security. But the Master’s words were unyielding to the excuses of the unwilling:

A scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:19-22)

Those whose hearts were stirred by the good news that it was time to restore the dwelling place of God on the earth forsook everything to follow the One who was leading the way.

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple... Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26,33)

“And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:38)

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:25-26)

Rebuilding the Temple

It wasn’t that Yahshua was being hard or unreasonable. It was all a matter of where He was going and what He was building: He was going to the cross and into death in order to redeem those whom He would build into an eternal dwelling place for the Holy One of Israel.²⁸ With all His heart He wanted His Father to get the faithful, holy nation He always desired, and He wanted the world He loved so much to be able to see the heart of His Father through the witness of that holy nation²⁹ — redeemed human beings living together in unity,³⁰ loving one another as He had loved His disciples³¹ — which was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. But in order for that to happen, they would all have to abandon their independent lives in “Babylon” and throw in their lot together in “Jerusalem.”

That is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Yahshua’s ascension. Pierced to the heart by the words Peter spoke, 3000 people responded to his call to “be saved from this perverse generation”³² by forsaking their old lives and banding together to form the nucleus of the new spiritual Israel:

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple courts, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart... The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that

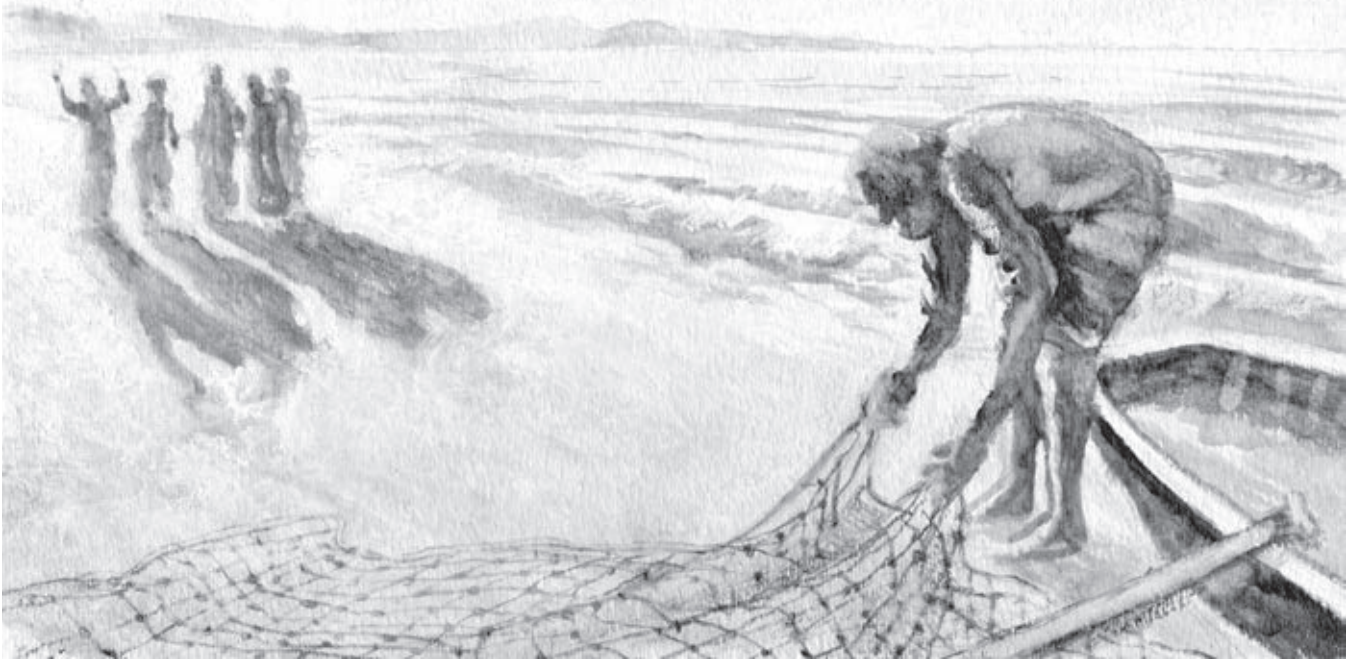
²⁸ John 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22; Revelation 21:2-3

²⁹ Matthew 24:14

³⁰ John 17:21-23

³¹ John 13:34-35

³² Acts 2:37-40



any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35)

Now, many Christians say that this common life did not last, or even that it was a mistake that God Himself had to break up by sending persecution.³³ The second claim is ironically absurd, considering the response the Master gave to Peter when he said, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has

*left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or wife or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **along with persecutions,** and in the age to come eternal life."* (Mark 10:29-30)

What happened on the day of Pentecost was the very hundredfold blessing the Master had promised His disciples who had given up everything, and the persecution that resulted was part of His promise, not a punishment for their obedience. In fact, the Master had consistently taught them to expect persecution if they were faithful to Him.³⁴

Furthermore, the hundredfold increase resulting from the wholehearted surrender of disciples was the very means by which the holy nation³⁵ would be built as they gave up their homes and farms, which were either sold to meet the pressing

needs of existing communities³⁶ or became the open door to starting new communities. In the same way that a beehive, when it fills up, sends out a swarm to start a new hive,³⁷ so the early church multiplied, replicating the pattern of the first community in Jerusalem, and experiencing the same persecution as a result of it.³⁸

As for the claim that the common life of the early church didn't last, that is sadly true, although it lasted much longer than most Christians think. What destroyed it was not persecution from without, but corruption from within. As long as all were full participants in their common life, with each member walking in the works prepared for him³⁹ and speaking the very utterances of God by the grace and strength He provided,⁴⁰ the spiritual temple continued to be built.⁴¹ They were truly a spiritual priesthood⁴²

³⁶ Acts 4:37

³⁷ See box on page 18

³⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:14

³⁹ Ephesians 2:10

⁴⁰ 1 Peter 4:10-11

⁴¹ Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19

⁴² 1 Peter 2:9

³³ Acts 8:1

³⁴ John 15:18-21; 16:1-2; Luke 6:26

³⁵ 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:12

WHERE DID THE GOSPEL COME FROM?

servicing under a faithful High Priest,⁴³ and their spiritual sacrifices were acceptable to God.⁴⁴ But gradually, self-concern⁴⁵ crept in like a deadly cancer, cooling off their original fervent love for one another,⁴⁶ and taking away their confidence⁴⁷ and outspokenness⁴⁸ until they were no longer qualified to be called His house:

But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the outspokenness of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)

Yet Another Babylon

Not long past the end of the first century, Yahshua followed through on His warnings in the letters in Revelation to the churches: He spewed their lukewarm religion out of His mouth.⁴⁹ He came like a thief in the night and took away their lampstands (the presence of His Spirit), and most of them didn't even notice.⁵⁰ The few overcomers died off,⁵¹ and the rest went on with a form of religion that denied the power to love as they had in the beginning.⁵² They had shifted off the rock they had been founded upon — the revelation that comes from obeying His commandments⁵³ — and as a result, darkness overtook them.⁵⁴

In effect, spiritually they were carried off to Babylon. Their walls of protection had been breached because God could not hear their prayers over the clamor of their apostasy,⁵⁵ so the enemy came in like a flood and destroyed the Temple, stone by stone.⁵⁶ They were taken captive by the evil one to do his will.⁵⁷ But just as the Jews who were carried away to Babylon, they developed a whole new religion that did not depend on the Temple, that is, the corporeal⁵⁸ expression of the

⁵⁵ *Apostasy* is departure from the apostles' teachings; see also the article, "James, the Insurgent," on our web site for more details on the condition of the church at the end of the first century. The following verses speak of what is required for one's prayers to be heard in heaven: 1 John 3:21-22; 1 Peter 3:12; Matthew 6:9-13; 1 Timothy 2:8

⁵⁶ 1 Peter 2:5

⁵⁷ 2 Timothy 2:26

⁵⁸ *Corporeal* means: 1) Having material or physical form or substance; 2) Affecting or characteristic of the body as opposed to the mind or spirit. Similar words for corporeal are the following: bodily, corporate, embodied, and incarnate.

⁴³ Hebrews 3:1-2

⁴⁴ Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16

⁴⁵ Philippians 2:3-4, NRSV (other versions water it down)

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 4:8; Revelation 2:4

⁴⁷ 1 John 3:14,16-22

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:24-26

⁴⁹ Revelation 3:16

⁵⁰ Revelation 3:3; 2:5; Romans 11:22

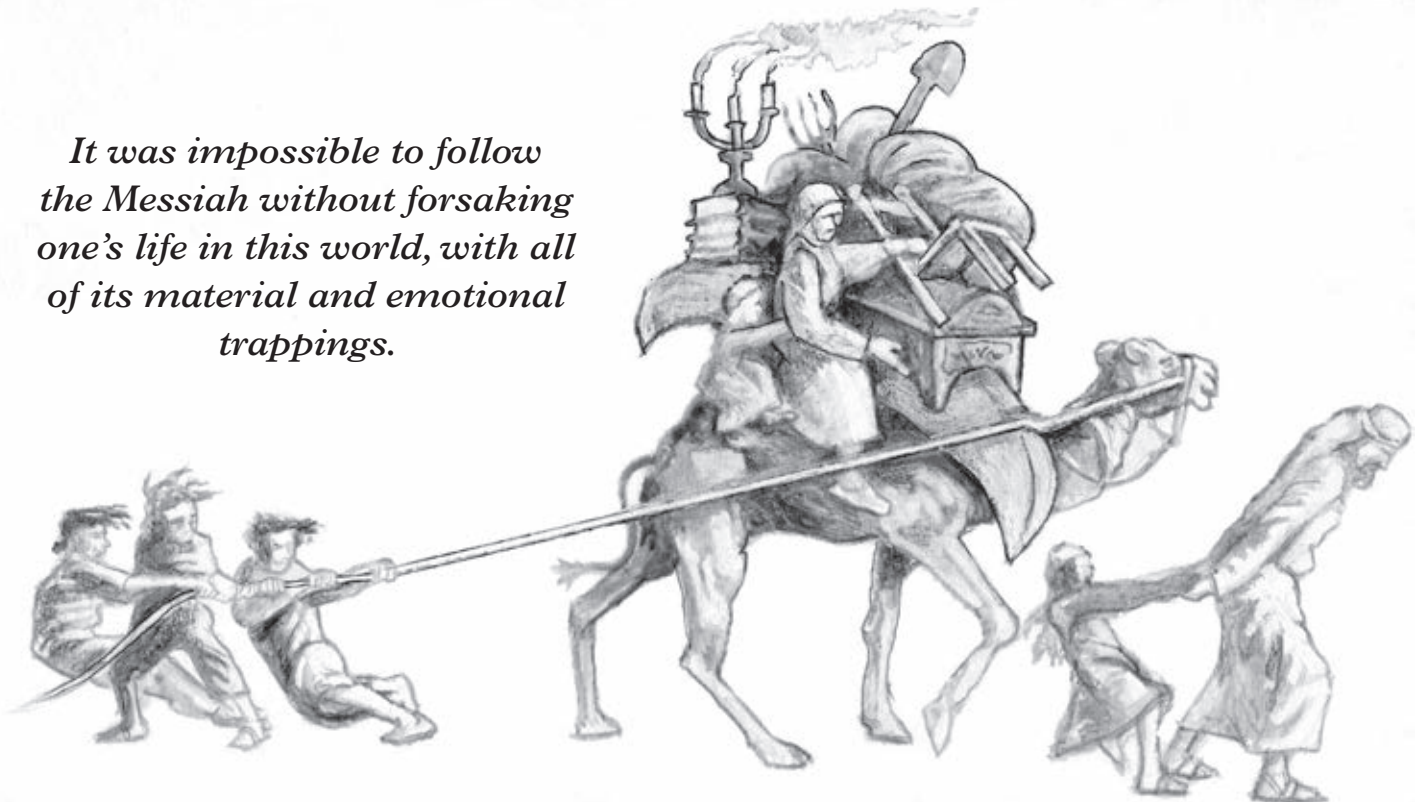
⁵¹ Revelation 3:4

⁵² 2 Timothy 3:5

⁵³ John 14:21; Matthew 7:24-27

⁵⁴ Matthew 16:17-18 (see the article, "Upon this Rock," page 16)

It was impossible to follow the Messiah without forsaking one's life in this world, with all of its material and emotional trappings.





Babylon is the false religious system of the world — including its worldly amusements and entertainment

twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...” (Acts 20:29-31)

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Messiah Himself, in His warnings to the churches, denounced these “synagogues of Satan”⁶⁵ that were beginning to appear as the first century was drawing to a close. Indeed, it was the exact counterpart of the synagogue system the leading Jews had developed in Babylon of old. They were led by those who claimed to be “Jews,” but did not have the obedient heart, faith, or deeds of Abraham.⁶⁶ And of course, their gospel⁶⁷ was not the same gospel Abraham had obeyed, the one Yahshua had preached, that called everyone to forsake everything to follow Him. Instead, the new gospel made the many comfortable living their independent lives in “Babylon” while giving their offerings to support the few who became the clergy. The “litmus test” for the faith ceased to be the response of love and obedience that produced community,⁶⁸ but was replaced by “right doctrine” (as if the two could actually be separated).⁶⁹

Of course, this new mystical religion came to be called *Christianity*. And just as Judaism developed in Babylon of old, Christianity became increasingly ritualistic and rigid, even centralizing its authority in a succession of popes analogous to the “Davidic dynasty” that the Jews

Body of Messiah — the daily laying down of their lives for one another,⁵⁹ the daily encouragement of their gatherings in which all prophesied,⁶⁰ and the visible unity and economic justice of their common life.⁶¹

This new religion followed the Nicolaitan (clergy/laity) pattern⁶² rather than the earlier Judean (one heart and soul) pattern.⁶³ The people were content to just attend a “worship service” one day a week, in

which nothing was expected of them but to follow a ritual of prescribed prayers, rote responses, and lifeless hymns, and to hear a sermon prepared by the appointed (or self-appointed⁶⁴) leader.

The apostle Paul had warned of the emergence of such a system, as the seeds of it had begun to germinate even while he was still alive:

“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking

⁵⁹ Luke 9:23; 1 John 3:16-17

⁶⁰ Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 14:24-26

⁶¹ John 17:21-23; Acts 4:32-35

⁶² Revelation 2:6,15; the term *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, “people,” hence, “people conquerors.”

⁶³ Acts 4:32; 1 Thessalonians 2:14

⁶⁴ 3 John 1:9-10

⁶⁵ Revelation 2:9; 3:9

⁶⁶ Romans 2:29; Galatians 3:29; John 8:39; Matthew 3:9

⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁶⁸ 1 John 3:14,16-18; 2:3-5

⁶⁹ See “The Shift from Community to Doctrine,” on our web site.



The people were content to just attend a “worship service” one day a week, in which nothing was expected of them but to follow a ritual of prescribed prayers, rote responses, and lifeless hymns.

had established in Babylon. Through its popes and bishops, Christianity repeatedly grabbed the reigns of the state to impose its will and to exact the support to feed its insatiable appetite for wealth and power, thus leaving a trail of blood stretching over 1,500 years. And lest anyone place the blame on the Roman Catholic Church alone, consider that her wayward daughters of the so-called Protestant Reformation exhibit the very same nature as their aged mother,⁷⁰ culminating in the utter confusion (*babel*) expressed in the 37,000+⁷¹ divisions of Christianity today:

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” (Revelation 17:5)

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every

⁷⁰ See our freepaper *The Black Box* for a more thorough treatment of this topic.

⁷¹ “When Jesus said, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,’ did he intend that the people called to bear his name in the world would eventually be divided into 37,000 competing denominations? That is the number of separate Christian bodies worldwide, according to missions statistician Todd Johnson of the World Christian Database.” Timothy George, “Is Christ Divided?” *Christianity Today*, July, 2005.

Upon this Rock

Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Many have quoted this verse to prove the impossibility of the gates of Hades (the realm of the dead) prevailing against the church. They assume that regardless of the spiritual and moral condition of the church, God has never withdrawn His Holy Spirit from her, for a body without a spirit is dead, and that would mean the gates of death had prevailed against the church. But this is not what Yahshua was promising to Peter that day.

What Yahshua confirmed in Peter was that he was hearing from the Father – receiving revelation – not merely repeating what other men might have said. Peter had heard in his heart that Yahshua was the Messiah, and that revelation caused him to pledge his utter devotion and obedience to Him. Now

that was something Yahshua could work with – people who could hear from His Father and obey what they heard. Upon such revelation He could build an eternal dwelling place for His Father’s Spirit, for that, after all, is what the church is supposed to be.

The Master said things like this to His disciples many times, such as in this familiar passage:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and

the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish





The Roman Catholic Church, with her wayward daughters of the Protestant Reformation express utter confusion (babel) in the 37,000+ divisions of Christianity today.

man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Hearing and obeying is the foundation of the house that will endure all that comes against it, and wise is the man who builds on that rock. But foolish is the man who builds his house on those who hear but do *not* obey. That house will not withstand the test. The floods of deception and the shifting winds of doctrine will prevail against that house.

So was Yahshua the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, a wise man or a foolish man? Was He contradicting Himself by saying that the house He was building would endure *regardless* of whether it was built on the foundation of hearing and obeying His words?

Many years later, in the waning days of the first-century church, the writer of Hebrews said these words to the church:

*But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are, **if** we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)*

The Greek word translated as “confidence” literally means *freedom in speaking; unreservedness in speech*. It is an outspokenness that comes from the confidence

that one is hearing and obeying Messiah’s words. Such outspokenness characterized the gatherings of the early church, when they were devoted to the apostles’ teachings, but as the first century drew to a close and the churches were drifting from the simplicity of their first devotion, their gatherings degenerated to rote ritual and a professional clergy. That is the record of history. So were they still “His house” in spite of Hebrews 3:6?

Here is another promise the Master made to His disciples:

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21,23)

Those who truly love Him obey Him, and He reveals Himself to them, which causes them to love and obey Him all the more. It is with such as these that He makes His home. He went on to say, “Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words.” What can be said about them? Are they also His dwelling place? 🏠

If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. (1 Corinthians 16:22)

unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.” (Revelation 18:2-4)

If you are a Christian, your soul is in great jeopardy. You have received a false gospel that has given you the false hope of going to heaven when you die. You have received another Jesus,⁷² not the True One,⁷³ Yahshua the Messiah, therefore you are still in your sins. But if you are willing to do the Father’s will, you can be released from your captivity, to serve

⁷² 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁷³ 1 John 5:20

Him where He is.⁷⁴ We invite you to come! ☛

“Come out of her, My people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” (Revelation 18:4-5)

⁷⁴ John 12:26



EDAH — The word for community in Hebrew is **edah**, which also means beehive. This word portrays the way a group of people or hive of bees live and work together with a common identity. Bees live a selfless life of devotion to the bee kingdom. They have no concern for themselves but only for the hive and the constant production of honey. So it is with those who are in the communities of God.

Like a Beehive

Have you ever watched a beehive? It is fascinating seeing thousands of little bees working together to produce honey. As you come near the hive, you can hear an exciting buzz as they go about the many tasks necessary to keep the hive alive. The workers are responsible to collect nectar and guard the hive. The young bees keep the hive in good condition, feed the larvae, and support in other household chores. There is never a dull moment in the busy life of a little bee.

This is much like the life that we have. No matter what we do, we love to do it together. Daily we gather to thank our Master for His salvation, and to hear Him speak to us through one another. This gathering keeps alive a genuine love and care for each other. As we work, we take advantage of the daily situations, guarding ourselves from the selfishness and pride that would come in to separate us and take away our love. Our children are a vital part of our life. We not only educate them, but we work with them to accomplish the simple tasks necessary to maintain a family life. Our life is not a dull routine of chores, but is full of the warmth that comes from the sweet fellowship of friends speaking their hearts to one another, celebrating the Sabbath every week, and participating in weddings and festivals.

But there are a few things that differ in our life from that of a beehive. One is that we are not driven by instinct or controlled by something separate from our own will. Each of us is here because we chose to leave behind our own separate lives to increase the life of this hive. Our life is not enclosed like the hive of a bee, nor do we have a stinger to harm any uninvited guests. We welcome anyone to experience our life with us. Please come and see what it is like to be part of a beehive of people expressing the warmth and love of our Creator. ☛

What is a “Christian Culture”?

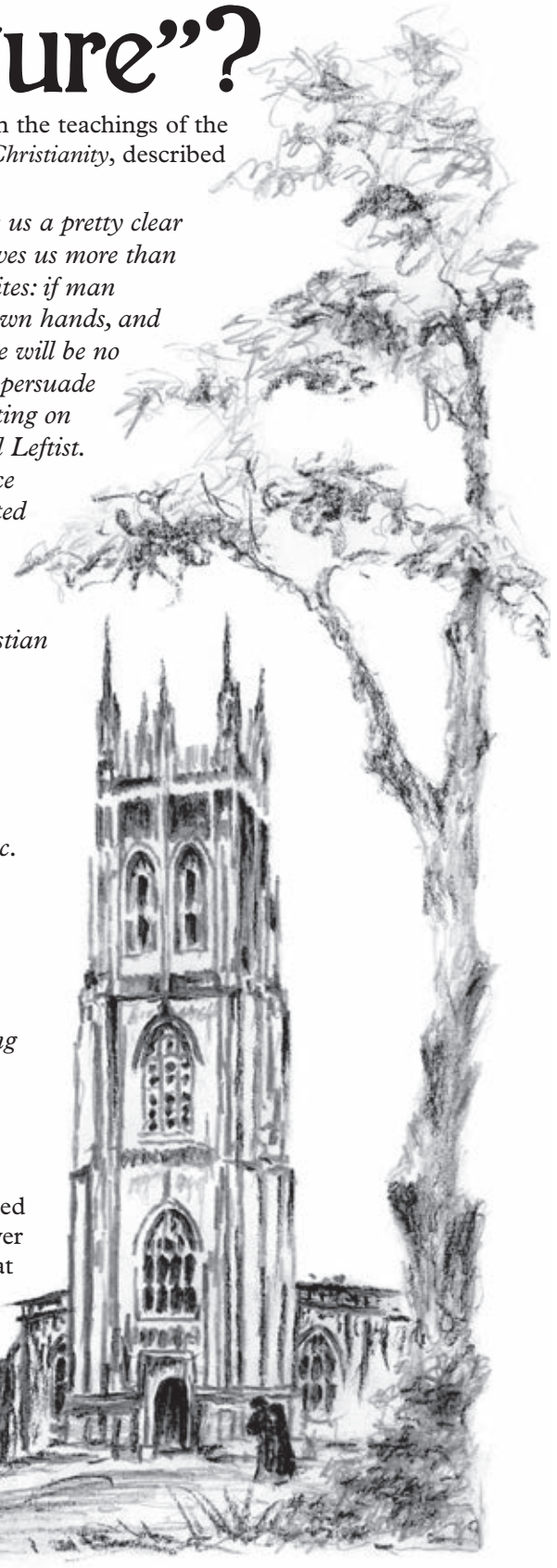
What would a society or culture be like that was actually based on the teachings of the Bible? The popular Christian author, C. S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, described it this way:

All the same, the New Testament, without going into details, gives us a pretty clear hint of what a fully Christian society would be like. Perhaps it gives us more than we can take. It tells us that there are to be no passengers or parasites: if man does not work, he ought not to eat. Everyone is to work with his own hands, and what is more, every one’s work is to produce something good: there will be no manufacture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them. And there is to be no “swank”¹ or “side,”² no putting on airs. To that extent a Christian society would be what we now call Leftist. On the other hand, it is always insisting on obedience — obedience (and outward marks of respect) from all of us to properly appointed magistrates, from children to parents, and (I am afraid this is going to be very unpopular) from wives to husbands. Thirdly, it is to be a cheerful society: full of singing and rejoicing, and regarding worry or anxiety as wrong. Courtesy is one of the Christian virtues; and the New Testament hates what it calls “busybodies.”

If there were such a society in existence and you or I visited it, I think we should come away with a curious impression. We should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, “advanced,” but that its family life and its code of manners were rather old-fashioned — perhaps even ceremonious and aristocratic. Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing. That is just what you would expect if Christianity is the total plan for the human machine. We have all departed from that total plan in different ways, and each of us wants to make out that his own modification of the original plan is the plan itself. You will find this again and again about anything that is really Christian: Everyone is attracted by bits of it and wants to pick out those bits and leave the rest. That is why we do not get much further: and that is why people who are fighting for quite opposite things can say they are fighting for Christianity.³

C. S. Lewis died knowing that he had not found the life he described here. He understood with the mind how things should be, but he never experienced it. What about you? Have you found the abundant life that Yahshua, the Son of God, promised? We hope that what you read in this paper will kindle a hope in you that such a life does exist in the Communities of the Twelve Tribes, and that you can be a part of it. 🙏

¹ *swank* – smartness in style or bearing. ² *side* – affected superiority; arrogance. ³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1952, p. 64-68.



On my Way



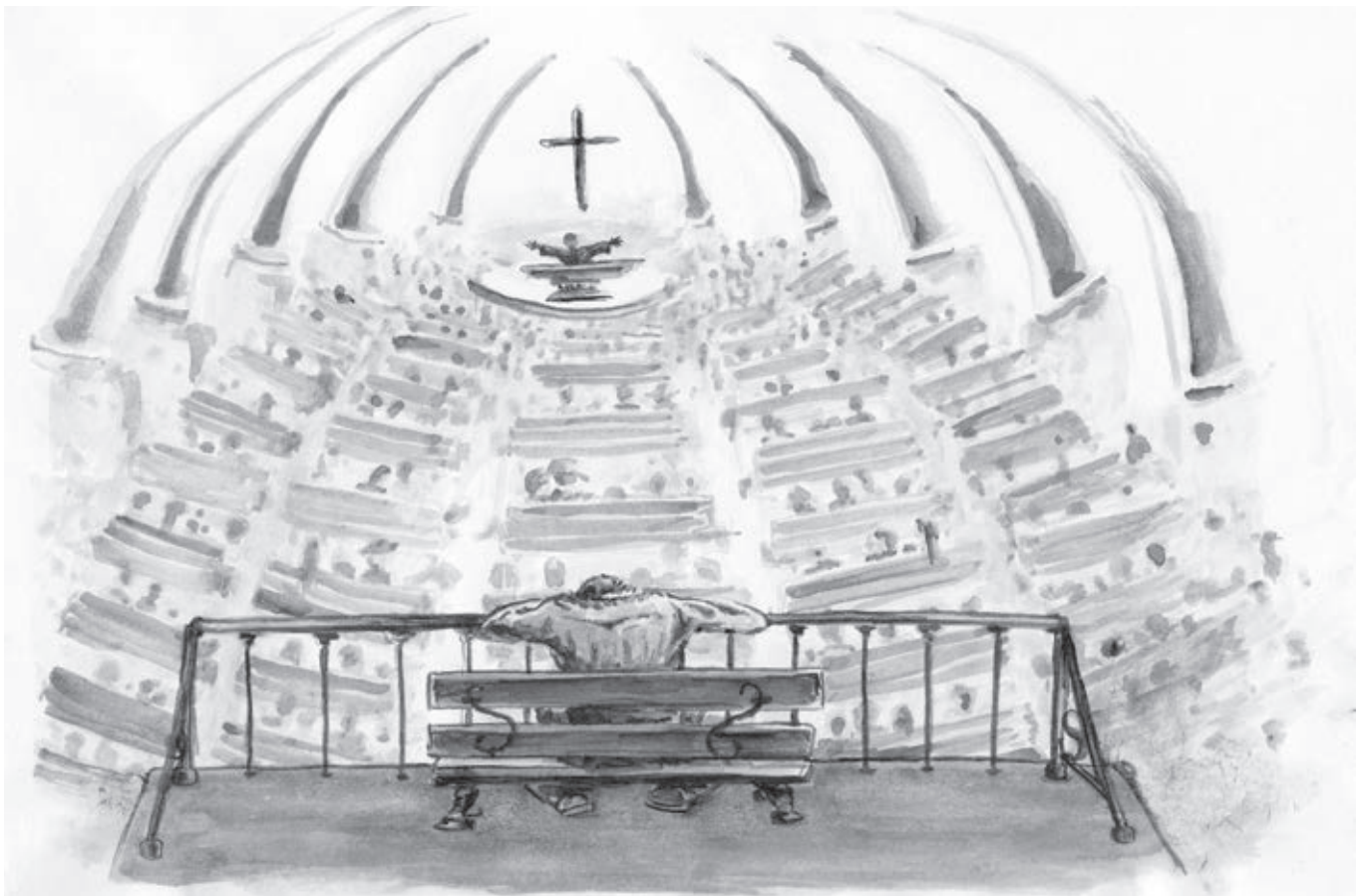
THERE I SAT IN THE BALCONY as the instructive words of the Reverend echoed faintly in the recesses of my mind. The previous minister had been with us for as long as I could remember, but fell into some sort of despair and consequently left town. I never heard why.

after months of guest speakers and impromptu sermons by various deacons and elders, the pastoral search committee finally found a man they felt was qualified enough to shepherd the fragile flock. A silver-tongued Doctor of Divinity, his English charm and wit was full of expression and emotion.¹ Normally, his sermons seized my attention, not only in the way of convicting me of my sins, but also because of his literary craft, his ingenious use of intonation and

inflection, and his effusive speech which often left one stirred in the emotions to the point of tears.

Somehow, this particular Sunday, I wasn't so aroused by his spellbinding message. Rather, it was the sea of people in the pews below that caught my eye and weighed heavily on my heart. "*What are we doing here and where are we going,*" I thought, as I gazed upon the heads of my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. There were thirty of us in all. We lived in conservative, well-kept residential neighborhoods within minutes of one another: our family of six, my mother's two sisters and their

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15



families, my mother's brother and his family, my mother's parents, my father's parents, and my uncle's parents. We were together often when I was young. Those were the best times. We gathered for birthdays, anniversaries, and all the holidays.

We were *good* people, Christians. We were taught that God is love and that Jesus died for our sins so that we could live decent, upright, and productive lives in the world. We were schooled to be rich, to succeed, to be first. "*You want to be the bread-winner,*" I was told. Although landscaping, lawn care, and home restoration were the kinds of work I liked to do, I often heard, "*You don't want to settle for being a laborer.*"

We attended a private Christian prep school, and most of us went to Christian colleges to be taught how to live the Christian life, to serve God, and impact the world. Little did our parents know, it was there, inside the walls of our Christian schools, where we learned well how to live a life of deceit and immorality.

Sex, drugs, and rock & roll were the major themes of study for most of the youth I knew. Children of pastors, teachers, missionaries, and Christian counselors, we were being prepped to become something greater, to make the world a better place. Families of doctors, lawyers, wealthy Christian businessmen, real estate developers, bankers, and insurance executives, we ennobled² ourselves by our pursuit of higher education and well-paying, prestigious careers.

Months after high school graduation I attended real estate school while also pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business and Economics at a local college, all at the prompting of a wealthy land developer who promised me great financial gain. The road to riches was paved for me, all in the good name of the Lord. After all, He blesses his good followers and causes them to prosper with big houses, big cars, and fat wallets — or so we were taught.³

²Ennoble — To confer dignity or honor upon.

³Luke 6:24

There I sat in the church balcony, looking over my future. I mulled over the thought: "*Was this my fate too?*" Their heads were graced with hues of grey, their Cadillacs always shining and clean, their Sunday suits and mink coats tailored to standards as high as some of the most prominent dignitaries of the age.

I noticed the waning health of the older generation. "*The older you get, the closer you get to death,*" I thought, "*and the closer you are to death, the closer you are to the pulpit,*" it seemed. That's where most of the grey is. Perhaps it is fear that drives them to the front; they need to make sure they don't miss any of the soothing words that help appease the pains of death as their generation fades into the memory of the young.⁴

Usually, I'd look down and see them in the first couple rows, my grandparents on each side of the family, but not this particular Sunday. My dad's father was plugged into a hospital bed, due to a brain

⁴2 Timothy 4:3-5; Ecclesiasticus 9:5-6

ON MY WAY

aneurism. He was a good man, a hard-worker, upright and respected, a deacon of the church.

I gazed upon the wooden cross high on the wall behind the preacher, then drifted back into consciousness as I heard the last few words of, “Trust and obey for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.” We all stood as he dismissed us in prayer. I turned a crossed brow to my sister as I heard the Reverend pray specifically for my grandfather, that he would be delivered from being tied up with all those plugs and wires. “Was he praying for his death or his resurrection from the bed?” I wondered.

As planned, we drove straightaway to the hospital to visit my ailing grandfather. Death loomed heavy over us. “What if...?” was all I muttered as my two sisters simultaneously stopped me in mid-sentence. We drove on in silence, as if in a muted dream, in slow motion.

Thump, the car doors slammed in unison. We carefully and cautiously walked toward the room where my grandfather lay. Just as I was about to enter, a frenzied nurse took my hand and closed the door behind her. “You must be the pastor,” she said.

“The pastor!” I grimaced. “I’m the grandson. Can I please go in and see my grandfather?”

“Oh!” came the grave reply. And then the dreaded, “I’m so sorry...”

The earth fell out from under me as I collapsed instantly to the floor. Holding on to my aching heart as I scrambled back up to my feet, I turned to my sisters, eyes full of tears, and proclaimed, “He’s dead!”

The funeral was preceded by a wake, which I wished I could have awoken from, as from a bad dream. It was one of the most awful things I have ever experienced. Unable to be consoled, I wailed over my grandfather’s dead body. I hated the way they made him look. The ashes

of his remains would have had more glory. This was my first encounter with death. The days and months that followed were somber. I will never forget my father’s words as he eulogized the life of his father: “If I could be but half the man he was, I would be a good man.”

Life... Death... Sorrows... How little did I understand? How little had I been taught? Ephesians 2:8 rang relentlessly in my ears. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...”

“For what?” I thought. “If it’s just so I can buy a Cadillac when I’m 65, spend my retired winters basking in the sun, and have all I lived and worked for come to nothing on my deathbed, then you can keep your gift.” Who was to say I was any better off than any one else on the face of the earth just because I said I believed in Jesus? What did it really mean to believe in Jesus anyway? We all did the same things, the Christian and non-Christian alike. We had the same jobs. We fought in the same wars. We went to the same schools. In so many ways, we had the same life and then we died. What difference did it make?

I’m reminded of one of my neighbors from childhood, Mr. Woods, an elderly man that lived across the street. He was always very kind. From time to time, I helped him with the care of his property. I mowed his grass, raked his leaves in autumn, and shoveled his snowy driveway in winter. His house was always in order. One day, as we were hanging up his summer awnings, I asked sheepishly, “Mr. Woods, do you believe in God?” knowing he didn’t much appreciate being disturbed while we worked except to give me instruction.

“God? Well, lad, I’m sure there is a God somewhere, but I am **not** a Christian, if that is what you mean. I don’t, and cannot believe in their God. So, if you’re asking if I believe in *that* God, the answer is, **NO!**” He



never told me why. His reply was emphatic. He seemed angry about it. His reaction almost frightened me. We went back to work. He died a few years later of a stroke, and, just like my grandfather, all he had went to the wind.

Christmas came a month after my grandfather's death. One Sunday after church, I sat waiting in a car in the parking lot of a shopping mall while my mother went in for some last-minute holiday purchases. I watched as the people rushed to and fro in what seemed to me to be a sheer state of hysteria. Within the

hour I saw my grandmother, my mother's sister, my father's sister, and several of the women of our church congregation drive into the parking lot, one by one. And I saw other neighbors and friends, the "unbelievers," rush into the stores, also hoping to satisfy all the desires on their Christmas wish lists. The people were rushing around like mad. As I watched, it dawned on me that I couldn't tell the difference. There was no difference. Should there be? Shouldn't there be?⁵ It all seemed so meaningless. Why should

⁵ 1 John 2:15-17

I believe in Jesus and live just like everyone else, but condemn them for their lack of belief? I hated it. It all seemed so arrogant, so shallow.

Months passed. I remember the day the commission checks started coming in after my first few real estate sales. A sense of satisfaction filled my soul, driving me further into the snare of pretension and fantasy. I was following in the footsteps of the "elders" in my life.

As time passed, I found myself hobnobbing with the rich. I rode in their Mercedes and slept in their mansions. I daily perused the pages

Is God Dead?

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him... What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood¹ off us?"

What Nietzsche meant by this oft-repeated statement was not that God has passed away in a literal sense, or even necessarily that God doesn't exist, but that we don't believe in God anymore, that even those of us who profess faith in God don't really believe. God is dead, then, in the sense that his existence is now irrelevant to the bulk of humanity. "And we," he says in *The Gay Science*, "have killed him." Nietzsche also believed that, even though he viewed Christian morality as nihilistic, without God humanity is left with no epistemological or moral base from which we can derive absolute beliefs.³

In Nietzsche's book *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche fights against how Christianity has become an ideology set forth by institutions like churches, instead of representing the life of Jesus. It is important, for Nietzsche, to distinguish between the religion of Christianity and the person of Jesus... "The word Christianity is already a misunderstanding- in truth, there was only one Christian, and he died on the

cross," he wrote in *The Anti-Christ* in 1888. Nietzsche respected that sincere and "genuine Christianity" which he considered "possible in all ages."⁴ But apparently, Nietzsche never saw any form or representation of this *genuine Christianity*, as he wrote the following:

*"I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are too venomous, too underhand, too underground and too petty — I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind."*⁵

"The church is precisely that against which Jesus preached — and against which he taught his disciples to fight."

"Christians have never put into practice the acts Jesus prescribed for them, and the impudent chatter about "justification by faith" and its unique and supreme significance is only the consequence of the church's lack of courage and will to confess the works which Jesus demanded."

"In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point."

Perhaps, if Nietzsche had witnessed a true and authentic representation of the love of Messiah through those that believe in Him, he might have concluded that God was actually alive, since His goodness could actually be seen in a people. ☮



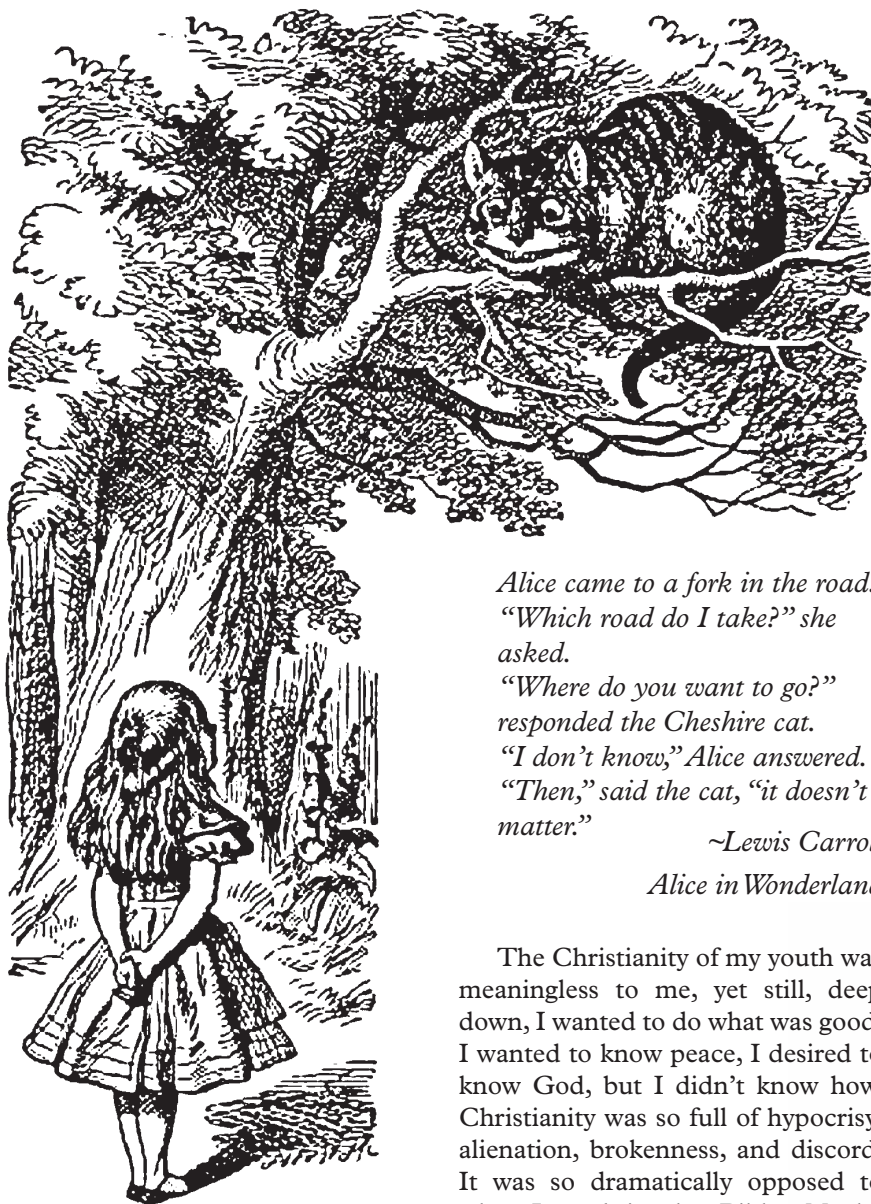
¹ Matthew 27:25; 1 John 1:7

² *The Gay Science*, 1882, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/nietzsch.htm>

³ <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/nietzsch.htm>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche#Christianity_as_an_institution_and_Jesus

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, 1888



Alice came to a fork in the road. "Which road do I take?" she asked. "Where do you want to go?" responded the Cheshire cat. "I don't know," Alice answered. "Then," said the cat, "it doesn't matter."

*~Lewis Carroll
Alice in Wonderland*

of *Architectural Digest* and *Forbes* magazines, which painted the perfect illusion of my future life of wealth and prestige. I was encouraged that I would do well. "You're charming, witty, and good looking." Wine at the top of the *Metropolitan* in NYC, gifts from *Tiffany & Co.*, fine dining at *Bookbinders* in Philadelphia, vacations on the Islands, compromised relationships, cheating, lying, lust, alcohol, and adultery were all around me. I was on my way to somewhere, though I wasn't sure whether I really wanted to go there.

The Christianity of my youth was meaningless to me, yet still, deep down, I wanted to do what was good. I wanted to know peace, I desired to know God, but I didn't know how. Christianity was so full of hypocrisy, alienation, brokenness, and discord. It was so dramatically opposed to what I read in the Bible. Maybe that was why my old neighbor Mr. Woods couldn't believe in the Christian God. For me, it made no sense to believe in something that bore no resemblance to my life.

Failed relationships, greed, selfishness, and brokenness of heart were a part of the lives of so many people I knew. I encountered many a good Christian soldier striving to fight the "good fight for the Lord." Waging war against evil spiritual forces, they stood alone, crying in the night, feeling abandoned,

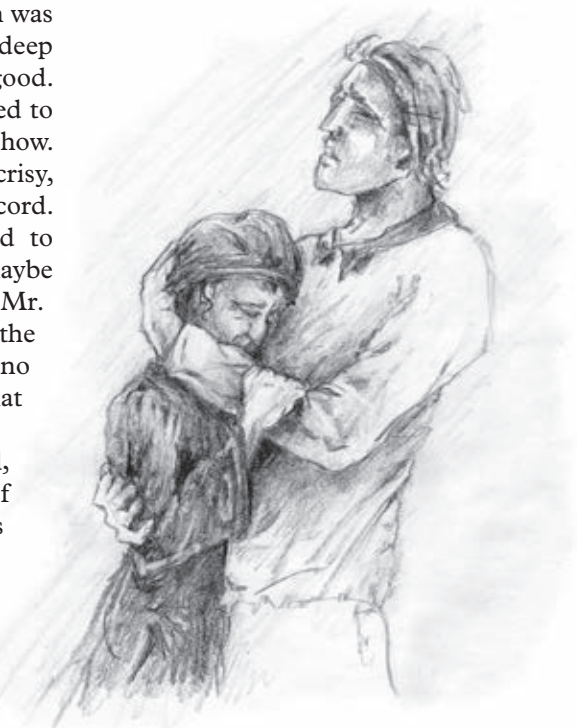
neglected, and forsaken. So many people who had once been esteemed as good Christian stewards of faith, hope, and love were entangled in a web of deceit, adultery, and divorce. I remember the day, as I held my mother close, bringing comfort to her at the loss of a loved one, I concluded that our *Christian* world was meaningless.⁶

"If there is no God, everything is permitted."

~Fyodor Dostoevsky

A very sharp pain had sunk deep into the very core of my being. Is this eternal life? Where was our Shepherd? We were like helpless sheep amongst ferocious wolves.⁷ There was no peace. There was no comfort. Was this the life of love and unity Jesus saved me for? The Good Shepherd was gone while His poor, helpless sheep got chewed up and spit out, left to die as people passed by, shaking their heads with pity in their hollow stares.

One beautiful, sunny, summer afternoon I jumped in the seat of my bright red, two-seater,



⁶ Isaiah 22:13; 1 Corinthians 15:32

⁷ Jeremiah 50:6-7; Acts 20:29

Italian rag-top after a full day of open house showings in the new countryside residential development I was contracted to sell. On the open country roads I went, burled walnut gear shifter in hand, the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra setting the appropriate tone for my delusion. Touring down the broad highway the car suddenly stopped, just as if I had turned the key off. I knew right away. The oil had run dry. There I sat on the trunk of my roadster, staring sullenly toward the setting sun. My life was going nowhere. I sat for hours. The world seemed so lonely, so false.⁸ I had become so arrogant, so selfish and empty. I felt so degraded. There I sat all alone.

There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless, a miserable business!" (Ecclesiastes 4:8)

A couple days later, I went to my mechanic to see if he was able to resurrect my prized possession. He was a short, hot-tempered Italian man who spoke in broken English. That day his command of the English language was loud and clear: *"You fool, you stupid fool... you ruined this car, a perfectly good engine... YOU STUPID FOOL!!!"*

Not long after, I gave up the pursuit of wealth and plunged myself into the depths of another vain quest, the pursuit of knowledge.

"For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief." (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

I needed answers. I wanted understanding. I was consumed with the desire to know why I existed. I knew it couldn't possibly be as shallow an answer as *"the sweet by-*

and-by," for I'd be going to heaven when I died.

"What is man that you are mindful of him?" Why was there so much turmoil on the earth? Why so much hatred, murder, envy and injustice? Why was I so selfish, so vain? What have I done with my life? How could I be such a fool? How could I know or believe in a good, loving God when I profaned His name by fulfilling my own gain, satisfying the lust of my eyes?⁹ My heart longed to know the God of peace. My grandfather had often told me, *"You must make God first in your life."*

There I found myself in the halls of higher learning in one of the most esteemed Christian liberal arts colleges of the nation. I majored in the study of English literature as well as the "arts" of Theology and Philosophy.¹¹

*"In the medieval university, theology was esteemed as the "Queen of the Sciences" because it was believed that the study of God was the foundation upon which any other inquiry must stand."*¹²

During my years in Christian college I studied the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, as well as the fathers of my "faith"

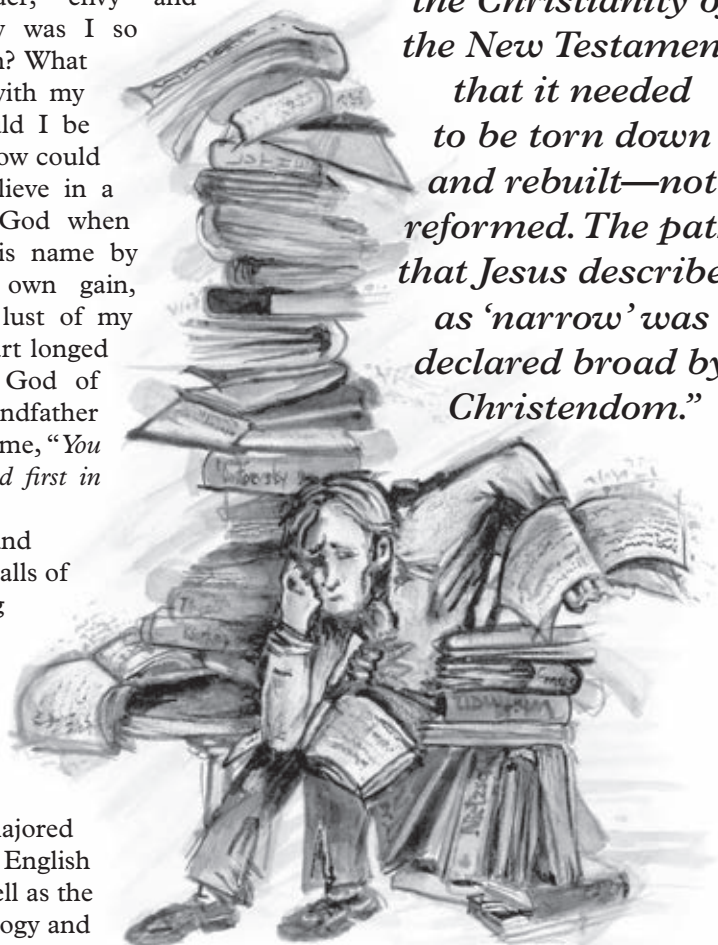
⁹ Psalm 8:4-5

¹⁰ Galatians 5:17; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:16-17

¹¹ Philosophy — the study of the truth; the love or pursuit of wisdom. (*World Book Dictionary*)

¹² http://campus.houghton.edu/orgs/rel-phil/theol_studies.htm

"Official Christianity had departed so far from the Christianity of the New Testament, that it needed to be torn down and rebuilt—not reformed. The path that Jesus described as 'narrow' was declared broad by Christendom."



(such as it was) — St. Augustine, Calvin, Luther, among many others. It was hard to focus. There were so many questions, but no answers. It was all so vast. History was so dark and the present was so painful. Was there any hope? It seemed to me that the church was no further along than it had been hundreds of years earlier in the days of Kierkegaard.

"Throughout his writings Kierkegaard maintained that conversion to Christ necessitated a qualitative leap of faith and hence involved the entire person." In his estimation, he felt "that 'Official Christianity,' or 'Christendom,' had departed

⁸ 1 Timothy 6:9-10

ON MY WAY

so far from the Christianity of the New Testament, that it needed to be torn down and rebuilt—not reformed. The path that Jesus described as “narrow” was declared broad by Christendom.”¹³

Friedrich Nietzsche was famous for saying “*God is dead.*” I wanted to understand this man. Why did he say that? At first, it seemed so offensive to me, but later, intriguing. I was by no means a scholar of the life and mind of Friedrich Nietzsche, but still I felt I could relate to what he said.¹⁴ Maybe this was what my old neighbor, Mr. Woods, had thought, and that was why he sounded so angry.

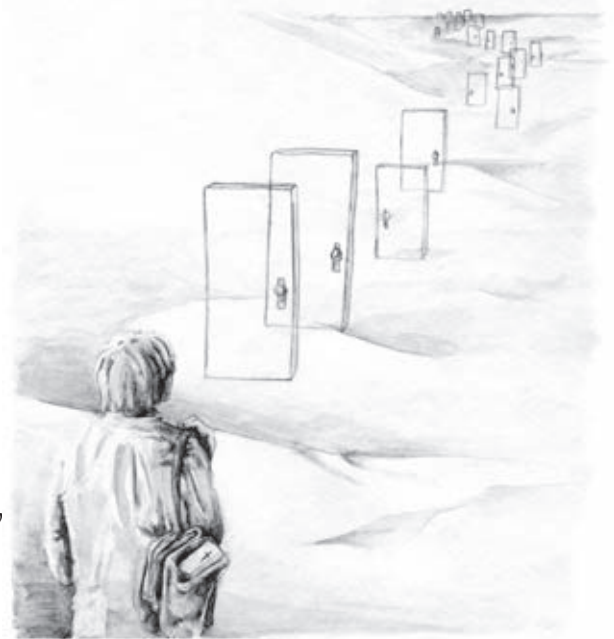
Nietzsche was right. Something had surely died in the early church as it grew into something very different than what it once was. They were no longer alive in Messiah,¹⁵ and therefore God was dead since He no longer had a Body to dwell in. The Body of Christianity was no longer a Body because it was no longer whole — it was divided. A body cannot be divided and continue to be a body. The only body He can dwell in is a Body as 1 Corinthians 12:12,25-27.

During my studies I groped to understand the writings of the Bible, the words of the Messiah, the representation of the life of the first church in the book of Acts. Their life seemed so pure, so simple. They seemed so devoted to one another and to their teacher. Have you ever read about their life in Acts 2 and 4? Was it idealism? Was it *Utopia*, nowhere? Was it anywhere? Was that band of faithful men forced to live that way out of fear of persecution? That’s what my uncle told me. He was a successful Christian doctor who told me that I was too *extreme* in my desire to serve God. He told me that I needed to get my priorities in the right place. He laid out to me the duties of his Christian life:

“You don’t have your priorities right, nephew. God doesn’t expect us to give up our livelihood, our careers in the world.¹⁶ My first priority is my profession. Second, is my wife, third my family, and finally, fourth, is the church. We are in the modern world. We live in the security of a Christian nation nephew. The only reason the first believers lived a communal life was because they were afraid they would lose their lives just as Jesus did. They gathered together out of fear. They had nothing else but each other. Don’t be so rash in your desire to do the Lord’s will. You are doing well. Go back to school and get that degree. You’ve earned it. You will be sorry if you don’t pursue your education.”

He sounded just like my other uncle, a highly respected Christian businessman, personal friend of the greatest and most popular evangelists, who propounded the same theme:

“If you don’t get your degree, you won’t get very far in life. What will you do? You might end up pumping gas or some low-life job as that. And we know,” as he knocked on his head, “that those who pump gas have nothing up here. If you’re so serious about following the Lord, you could go into the missions or something of that nature, but,” he said somewhat reluctantly, “I wouldn’t make a career out of it. After all, it doesn’t pay very well.”



How could this be? Were we reading the *same* Bible? From where did their thinking come? I thought Jesus associated with the lowly, took identity with the *underdogs* of society, giving them hope of a new life.

“I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

~Mahatma Gandhi

“The unique impression of Jesus upon mankind — whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world — is proof of the subtle virtue of this infusion. Jesus belonged to the race of prophets. He saw with open eyes the mystery of the soul. One man was true to what is in you and me. He, as I think, is the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of man.” ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

What my relatives espoused as the accounts of the first church I could not find anywhere in my Bible.

“Then those who GLADLY received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them... Now all who believed were together, and had all

¹³ <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/kw23a.htm>

¹⁴ See the box, “Is God Dead?”

¹⁵ Romans 6:11; 1 Corinthians 15:22

¹⁶ Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 14:25-33; Acts 2:45; Luke 5:1-11

things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among them all as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” (Acts 2:41,44-47)

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:25-26)

In my estimation, they were the true disciples. A disciple, after all, is one who is devoted to the teachings of another, practices them, and teaches others to do the same, just as they were commissioned in the gospels:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

It seemed to me that their lives were precisely what Kierkegaard advocated as the only means of true belief in Jesus Christ:

“Conversion to Christ necessitated a qualitative leap of faith and hence involved the entire person.”

I knew that my entire person was not involved in my “conversion” to Christ. How could I become a disciple? It was as if there was a great chasm between the life of the first church and our lives in this present world. It was almost as if people thought that the first disciples were the *only* disciples, and we are of



a different category now, called *believers*. They were the “Apostles” and we are “Christians.” If you were *really* serious about “serving the Lord,” you’d become a missionary and base yourself in some starvation-ridden third-world country. Of course, we were told that not all are *called* to such a life of *devotion*.

What did it mean to follow the Son of God, to truly obey Him? It seemed clear in the Scriptures what was required of all who believe in Him, but I needed someone to help me know how to do this. Why was it so complicated? Where was my teacher?¹⁷ How would I get there? Was there anyone who could show me the way? I want to “*Trust and Obey*” as we sang in the hymn. I was so confused. My soul was in turmoil. Though supposedly saved, clearly I was lost.

¹⁷ Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 14:33; Mark 10:29-30; John 12:25-26; Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35

In my quest for higher understanding, my heart continued telling me that there was something greater. Surely the great and wise men that went before me would help show me the way. My teachers would know. They were further along than me.¹⁸ I wanted to pursue love, faith, and obedience to His Word.¹⁹ I went to my teachers, since they were men with understanding and wisdom. I went to them in tears, pleading with them to show me the way. How do I do the will of God? Where do I go? What do I do? Was the life of the first church all in vain? Is it not possible in the modern world to live as they lived? It was so crippling when I would hear, “it was just for them in their day to live as they lived. It wasn’t meant for believers to live that way for all time.” What about sharing with those who are needy? What about loving and caring for

¹⁸ John 15:20

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:1

ON MY WAY

one another?²⁰ What about the widow and the orphan, and a home for the lonely?²¹ Is it just a dream?

I spoke up in class about love, unity, peace, and justice. I continually asked about the life of the early church, and was chided several times by my teachers. Once, in questioning the doctrines of Calvinism and the Reformation fathers, I praised the simple life of devotion the early believers had shared. I was told that I was confusing people with my overly simplistic views on the Christian faith. But I thought I remembered reading somewhere that you had to become like a child to enter the Kingdom.²²

I was told I must remain quiet in the classroom. I stood up in protest, and said, *"I have every right to express my views. My views actually come right off the very pages of the Bible we both hold in our hands!"* I couldn't see the words that my hermeneutics professor spoke anywhere in the Bible. Three months later, he died of a brain tumor. I couldn't understand why coming to understand how to follow Jesus should be so hard.

"Men reject their prophets and slay them, but they love their martyrs and honor those whom they have slain."

~Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Months later, I felt so afflicted. Almost without hope, I scheduled a meeting with the head of the religion department. Certainly, he would be able to give me sound guidance.

"Yes, how can I help you?" He said as he swirled around in his chair. He held his PhD in Theological Studies. The gold-plated plaques filled the wall behind him. He had numerous credentials. He had written many books on the Christian faith. In desperation I asked him if he could help me figure out what to do with my life.

"I want to serve God with my whole heart, just as it says in

²⁰ 1 John 3:14-19

²¹ Psalm 68:4-6; James 1:27

²² Mark 10:15

I felt like a laboratory rat slamming my head into the wall over and over, trying to escape. Will I ever get out of the trap I am in? Will I ever find what I am searching for?

Deuteronomy 6:4.

I want to obey the teachings of Jesus and teach others to do the same just as He said in Matthew 28:19-20 so we can bring about the reality of the life of the first disciples in Acts 2 & 4 and fulfill the words of the son of God in John 17 and bring about an end to all the hurt, all the injustice, all the suffering of mankind! What should I do? Can you help me? Should I go to seminary? Should I become a missionary?"

"Well", he said as he reclined, hands behind his head. "This is a noble pursuit you have — the life of the mind. It is the life of higher learning as we seek Him through our struggle as mere men with finite understanding. You have chosen a difficult path. You seem to be doing well in school. You are obviously a thinker, a seeker. One thing I would advise is that you never stop asking questions and you must remember, we don't ever find the truth, but the truth finds us..."

The phone rang and our conversation was cut short. I waited for a moment as he turned his back on me and whispered in an agitated voice to what seemed to be his wife, "I don't care where you put the



chairs just as long as you don't move the new widescreen. It's Super Bowl Sunday next week and where I have it is where I want it..."

I was left in despair. I thought I was going to lose my mind. That's actually what I wanted to do was lose my mind. I didn't want my mind anymore. I didn't even want my life anymore.²³ I never could bring myself to entertain suicide in the slightest way, though I knew others that did and a few that actually succeeded. I scribbled on a piece of paper: Thank you for your time... and walked away without disturbing him...

"Things are entirely what they appear to be and behind them... there is nothing."

~Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

A glimmer of hope returned as I learned that an English professor of mine had written a wonderful book about community with a hopeful theme of caring for the earth and one another as stewards of God's goodness. I read his book and highlighted many aspects of it, yearning to talk with him about the hope he had of a sustainable life

²³ John 12:25

in Christ and in sharing a life with others that believe. I set up a meeting with him in his office.

“Welcome, please have a seat.” He said, as he laid his pipe down and turned up the window fan. It was a non-smoking zone, but he gracefully apologized and said that he couldn’t bring himself to give up the pleasant, pungent aroma of his sweet, cherry tobacco.

“I read your book and I hoped we could talk about it a bit.” I said, anticipating his reply.

He smiled large, “Oh, yes, my book. Yes, yes, it is a nice idea isn’t it? Of course, it’s not for everyone. It was certainly by no means a prescription for all believers any more than was the life of the first disciples in the book of Acts. I hope you didn’t misunderstand me, did you? I don’t think we are all expected to live life in community. Besides, if I actually did what I said, I would have to give up all this...” He spread his arms like the wings of an eagle revealing the great volumes of books, novels, journals, etc., that stood upright on the mahogany shelves from floor to ceiling on three walls of his office.

“If Jesus Christ were to come today people would not even crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, and hear what he has to say, and make fun of it.”

~Thomas Carlyle

“If Jesus came back today one thing he wouldn’t be is a Christian.” ~Mark Twain

Will this madness ever end? I felt like a laboratory rat slamming my head into the wall over and over, trying to escape. Will I ever get out of the trap I am in? Will I ever find what I am searching for?²⁴ As it turned out, my once-esteemed professor died during a mountain hiking expedition about a year and a half later.

Finally, I committed myself to writing an essay exposing the fallacy of the Christian faith. I called the essay, “*Christianity, a Whitewashed*

²⁴ Proverbs 2:4-5

Faith.” I described Christianity as a fallen house, a “*diluted and convoluted religion of utter confusion.*” The theme of my paper was: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great...”²⁵ Identifying with the *Kierkegaardian* understanding that *Christendom* was no longer on the foundation of the Apostles of the first church, I maintained that Christianity was indistinguishable from the world. Being mixed indiscriminately, it became a disorderly house, mixed up in a contradictory and confused philosophy. It was vain religion. It was not the authentic and genuine life of devotion and simplicity it once was. It needed to be laid waste, torn down completely, and rebuilt upon the foundation which the gates of the underground could not prevail against.

Still, I believed there were people who sincerely wanted to do God’s will. I knew many that were groping to know how to “live for Him.” Just as John the Baptist called from the wilderness to Israel to come out of the apostate religion of the day, the apostle Peter commanded the multitudes around him in Acts 2:40, “*Be saved from this wicked and perverse generation.*” In the last days, a voice will also cry out into the earth:

“Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues...for her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her sins... In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ (Revelation 18:4,5,7)

I continued to hold out the hope that a restoration of the church was attainable. I insisted that there must be a re-birth of the life of faith and simple devotion the first disciples once shared. The paper I wrote was

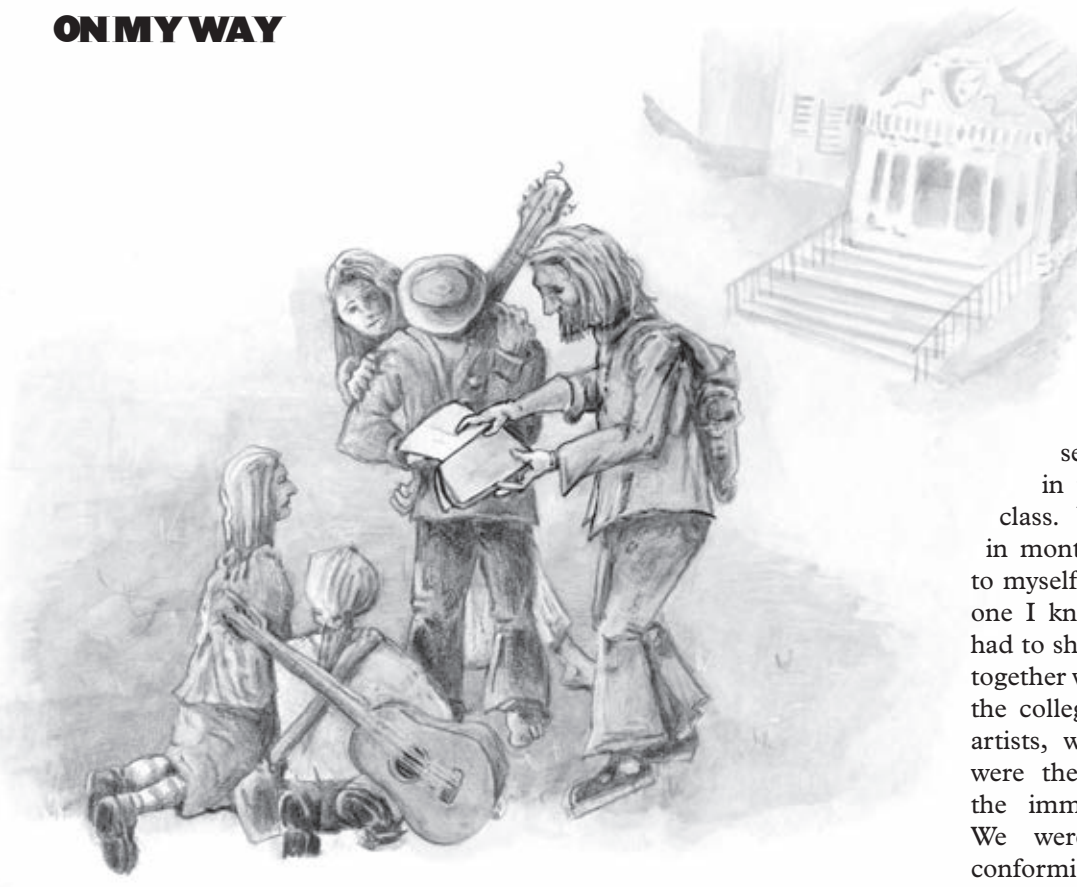
²⁵ Revelation 18:2

enough to persuade my Philosophy professor that what I had written was “*the closest way toward what it meant to believe in and entrust one’s life to the Son of God.*” He wrote that in red at the end of my paper. “*But,*” he said sadly, shaking his head low as we sat in his home over tea and cookies, “*just don’t know... I just don’t know...*”

I, too, didn’t know. The only clarity I had was that all my vain babbling took me nowhere. There we were, His people, trapped in the confusion of *Babylon*, manipulated and deceived. I continued to rave about these things with friends for a long time. At one point, we talked about forsaking the “institution” altogether, fleeing to the mountains, working the land to grow our own organic food, caring for each other, banding together, and raising children together. Sadly, it was only a dream. I would take long walks at night and gaze into the starry skies, wondering whether I was looking into the same universe Abraham was shown as He was promised long ago in Genesis 15:5, that he would be the father of a mighty nation.

And then, one day, amidst a crowd of people at a folk festival, I met a peculiar man — peculiar in the sense that my conversation with him was markedly different from the usual conversation I often had about





God and Christianity. He told me he belonged to “a people.” They had surrendered their lives in this world, and now they are a community of hope. He read to me:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

He spoke with authority and love. He had peace in his eyes. He spoke to me about love, joy, and peace.²⁶ He said *his* people love one another and care for each other just as the first disciples did in the first church, before corruption set in and selfishness took over, destroying the simple life they had once shared. He

said they were the hope of the very last prayer of Jesus that He prayed in the garden in John 17:20-26.

What happened to the wonderful life of love they had is just like when fungus grows and takes over the life of a tender flower. What once was radiant and beautifully fragrant turns foul, fades, and withers to the wind. He gave me some papers to read and told me I could visit anytime. He said, “If you are willing, you can share the same life,”²⁷ and he handed me a small paper that spoke more about the hope he had.

I was so drawn to this man. I took in every word as one who desperately guzzles water after wandering aimlessly through the dry and deadly desert.²⁸ I could hardly believe it was true. There was actually a people that lived what the Bible said. I was so excited to tell everyone I knew. I was consumed with the desire to know more.

Several months passed. I never forgot my encounter with that man.

I never failed to bring up in conversation what it meant to be a disciple of the Son of God. Some of my friends were just as eager to understand these things while others just shrugged it off and told me to loosen up.

Early the next school season I passed a friend in the hallway on my way to class. We hadn’t seen each other in months. Immediately I thought to myself: “She’s the one! She’s the one I knew would listen to what I had to share.” Later that day we met together with several other friends on the college green. We were seekers, artists, writers, and musicians. We were the lonely, the drug-addicts, the immoral, and the rebellious. We were the conforming non-conformists, hippie wannabes, with our beards, torn jeans, long hair, and communistic philosophies. We envied the Woodstock Generation and felt like there was something much more real going on back then. With Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens, Joni Mitchell and the Grateful Dead playing in the background some of us wanted a way out. Some would settle and wash into the mainstream and others would drop out altogether.

There we sat on the lawn. In my bag, I had the paper I had received from that man of peace. The words on those pages were life to me. I began to tell my friend about the people I met. She told me about a farm she had visited in Nova Scotia. I cocked my head at her as I eagerly reached into my bag to show her my precious jewel. On the front cover it read, “*We know the way, we’ll bring you home.*” At almost the same moment she reached into her bag and pulled out a paper. Our hearts raced as we soon realized we had met the same people in two different places.

Two weeks later she ran up to me at a street fair and shouted out,

²⁶ Galatians 5:22

²⁷ John 6:44; 7:17

²⁸ John 7:37; Revelation 21:6; 22:17

“They’re coming!!! They’re coming to bring me home. I’m leaving everything. I’m free, I’m free!!!”

A week or so later they did come. They were so peaceful, so different, so simple and kind. They called themselves disciples of Yahshua, the Son of God. They were husband and wife, Kepha and Sarah. The night before her departure, my friend and I had invited all of our friends over for supper. The house was full; probably thirty or more of our friends were there. Kepha and Sarah made a meal for us. They looked at all of us with eyes of love, and spoke to us with words of hope. Some of my friends writhed at their words. Others found some hope and truth in what they said, but couldn’t bring themselves to deny their own lives and all they thought to be the *truth*. Their words seemed to me so genuine, deep and true.

At one point, Kepha went out to his car to fetch some bags. I followed him and when he turned back toward the house I could barely bring out what was in my heart. “*I want what you have!*” as I fell into his arms weeping.

“You can have it, it’s free. I will say to you what was said to me: Come and follow me. If you are willing you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. You are free to follow but it will cost you everything you have. You must follow the Master where He is.²⁹ In order to follow Him you must do what He said.³⁰ You must take up your cross and follow.³¹ It’s life for life. You have to hate your own life in this world. This is what Yahshua spoke in Matthew 10:37-39 and John 12:24-26. This is the only way you will find life. These are the very words of Yahshua, the Son of God. His desire is to set you free.”

My friend followed the call, and, later, I too followed, and then another of our circle of friends. The *truth found us* and we have been set free. We were immersed into a whole

new life.³² We belong to the One, the only One who has the power of Life in His hands. His name is Yahshua, mighty and powerful to save.³³

We now belong to a people, a gathered people. We are being established as twelve tribes in twelve geographical regions throughout the earth. We’ve given up everything to follow the Son, and now we are gaining all things a hundredfold, as we pray together morning and evening that His Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven,³⁴ and we’ve inherited eternal life.³⁵ We live together with others that have given up all to follow the Son of God in simple obedience to His Word. We are so thankful. We sing together, dance together, laugh and cry. We are devoted to one another because we are devoted to Yahshua. We have true fellowship with one another because the love of God has been poured into our hearts and therefore we provide for one another’s needs.

Ten years after receiving the call to follow Jesus with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, I was awakened the other day by the sweet sound of my two children, ages five and three, singing a song we learned together: “Come and follow the call to worship Him, come and give to Him all you have. He gives us grace as we seek His face, power to overcome...”

“The soul is healed by being with children.”

~Fyodor Dostoevsky

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

(John 16:33)

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yahshua is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:4-5)

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my Son. (Revelation 21:7)

Do you believe in the Son? Do you believe that Jesus meant what He said? Do you walk with Him where He is? Do you desire to serve Him with all your heart, soul, and strength? Listen to the voice and you will hear the faint call... “*Come to Me, My people. Come out of confusion.*” Hear the words of the Master,

“Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

Kevin



²⁹ John 12:26

³⁰ John 13:35

³¹ Matthew 16:24

³² Romans 6:3-6

³³ Matthew 1:21

³⁴ Matthew 6:9-13

³⁵ Matthew 19:27,29

LEAVE, ENTER, BECOME

Abraham, Circa 2000 BC

Thousands of years ago, God found a man who was completely willing to do His will. His heart was longing for something greater than the life he was living. Then one day he heard a voice speak something very clearly to his heart.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country and your kindred and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2)

This man's name was Abram. At 75 years of age, he heard this call from God and he obeyed without hesitation.¹ He immediately left the land of his fathers, and after a long and difficult journey, he entered into the land that God showed him and became a new creation in the land of promise.² God called this new man *Abraham*, because he would be the father of a great nation, for God wanted a whole nation of people with the same heart as this man. Abraham's response to God's call would forever be the foundation for all those who would come after him, desiring to follow their Creator.³

Abraham was called to *leave* one place and *enter* into another. Had he not left the land of his fathers, he would not have been qualified to be the seed of the nation God wanted to establish. He had to obey the call. Some 4000 years later, the same response is required of anyone who wishes to be saved from this perverted generation.⁴

Babylon, Circa 500 BC

Many years later, God called Abraham's wayward offspring, who

had been in Babylon for 70 years of discipline, to leave and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.⁵ Of the roughly one million Jews who were living in Babylon at that time, only about 42,000 returned.⁶ Most had grown comfortable with their lives in Babylon. As Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian wrote



in his chronicles, "...yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions."⁷

The journey back to Jerusalem was over 700 miles. It wasn't easy. The comforts of Babylon could not accompany those who left on the journey. But for those whose hearts were stirred by the call to return to the land that God had promised to their forefather Abraham, and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the suffering could not compare with the joy set before them. It was only the remnant who thirsted for their land that heard the call and obeyed.

Galilee, Circa 30 AD

These stories of Abraham, Israel, the Babylonian exile, and the return to rebuild were passed down from generation to generation until Yahshua* heard them from His mother and father, and from the

rabbis. Surely, with His tender and pure heart, He must have asked His parents and teachers why so many stayed behind in Babylon. It must have been so difficult for Him to understand why anyone would not heed the call to return and rebuild their beloved city. Imagine the look on His young face when His parents had to explain to Him that it was because they had grown comfortable and didn't want to leave their possessions and unwilling family members. Why would anyone hesitate if their God was calling them? Why would anyone value "things" over doing God's will?

As time went by and Yahshua grew into a man, He found Himself extending the very same call to his fellow Israelites.⁸

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him." (Matthew 4:18-22)

After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him." (Luke 5:27-28)

Yahshua called His disciples in the very same way that God had called both Abraham and the Jews out of Babylon. Those who were stirred in their hearts did not hesitate, but left everything to follow him.⁹ It was

¹ Genesis 12:4 ² Genesis 17:1-8 ³ Hebrews 11:8; John 7:17-18 ⁴ Acts 2:40 ⁵ Ezra 1:3-5 ⁶ Ezra 2:64 ⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.1-3. ⁸ Mark 1:16-20 ⁹ Mark 10:28-30 *Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. Please see page 63 for a more in-depth explanation.



Disciples are called to literally lay down all family attachments, worldly entanglements and material security to follow Messiah.

consistent with the way His Father had always called those who were willing to do His will.

However, like the many who had stayed behind in Babylon, there were many in the Master's day who chose comfort over their salvation. When a well-to-do young man came running and knelt down at Yahshua's feet, asking what he must do to gain eternal life, Yahshua answered,

"Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up your cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:21)

Though the rich young man heard the clear call just as his forefather Abraham had, his face fell.¹⁰ He valued his possessions more than following the Master. He had a *cause* to not obey Him.¹¹ The dark shadow of the torment he would someday face in death slowly fell over his face with the deepest gloom. He would rather have heard another message, one that would have allowed him to hold onto his life and possessions, but this was not the command, nor had it been for Abraham or the Jews in Babylon.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their nets,¹² which were their profession and livelihood, to follow the Master. Paul also "suffered the

loss of all things,"¹³ counting it as rubbish. All who responded to the gospel left everything behind. The contrast between Mark 10:28-30 and verses 17-22 is chilling. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole entire world yet forfeits his own soul?¹⁴

In the same manner as Abraham, those who heard the good news on the day of Pentecost, *gladly* received the message and left everything.¹⁵ Their possessions were used to establish the first community, as it is recorded:

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45; see also Acts 4:32-35)

So these steps are the steps of a faith that *works*. Abraham did it and started a whole new culture and nation. The first disciples did the same. Therefore, these same essential steps of *that* faith must be followed today by anyone who desires to be saved.¹⁶ All those in the first century who were cut to the heart by the gospel they heard knew what they had to do before they could call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. They understood that the terms of gospel were life for life,

without compromise. If they wanted to drink of the living water, it meant forsaking their life, and all that it encompassed, and being immersed into the new culture that was before them.

Here and Now

Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:6-8)

At the head of the list of those worthy of spending eternity in the lake of fire are the *cowardly and unbelieving*. They are those who, for the fear of losing their own life and possessions in this world, reject the gospel that they hear from a righteous sent one.¹⁷ They do not overcome all that stands in the way of drinking the water of life. They are unwilling to leave their life in the fallen society. They have a cause that is greater in their eyes than the call of Messiah and His Bride:

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And the one who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17)

The word translated *freely* literally means *without a cause* to hinder them from drinking. The word *come* means to leave one place and arrive at another.¹⁸ So if anyone is truly *thirsty* for the water of eternal life, let him *overcome* anything that would hinder him, *leave* behind all that he possesses, and follow the Master in the same way the disciples did.¹⁹ Those who are

¹⁰ Mark 10:22 ¹¹ Revelation 22:17 ¹² Matthew 4:18-22 ¹³ Philippians 3:8 ¹⁴ Mark 8:36 ¹⁵ Acts 2:41 ¹⁶ John 8:39 ¹⁷ Matthew 10:40-41; John 13:20; 7:17-18 ¹⁸ John 6:44 ¹⁹ Luke 10:16; Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26,33

willing to do the will of the Father will *come* gladly, with great joy over the hope of gaining the thirst-quenching water of eternal life.²⁰

The First Step in Obeying the Gospel

Just as Abraham and the disciples of old obeyed, the first step in obeying the gospel is to *leave* one place and *enter* another.²¹ You leave your old life in this world and are born again into a brand new culture, with a brand new heart that is quenched of all thirst.²² Abraham did what the rich young ruler would not do. He turned his back on his previous life. He did not cower back at the command to leave it all behind. He said his farewells, kissed his loved ones good-bye, and placed his life in the hands and care of the One who called him to the land of promise. None but the willing will *come* to this new place.

So can someone be a disciple, yet remain in Babylon? Can one

become a disciple while remaining in his old life, at the same address, working the same job, enslaved to the same passions,²³ immersed in the affairs of this world?²⁴ Can one accept the world's values, judgments, and political pursuits and be a disciple?²⁵ Is it possible to wallow in the world's excesses, letting your children be trained by the world's ideals,²⁶ being fully identified with the world, yet claim to follow in the steps of Abraham?²⁷

The answer is the same today as it was then: *No*.

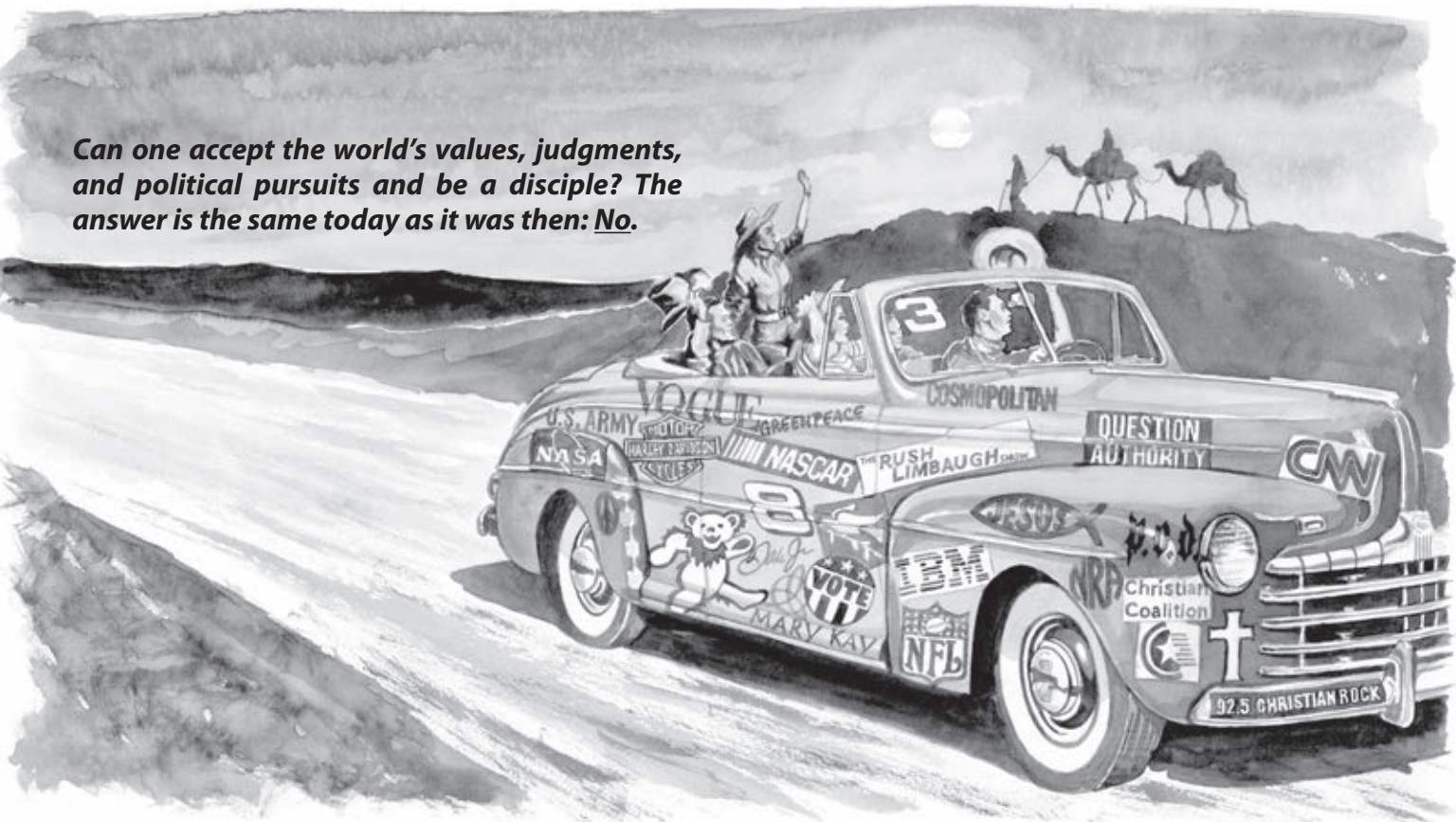
If you are willing to do the will

of God, you will hear the call and come. You will *leave* your rotten, stinking life in this world and *enter* into the new life of love and forgiveness that the Messiah, Yahshua, is establishing in these last days.²⁸ Only *there* can you serve Him²⁹ by serving your brothers and sisters, night and day.³⁰ And only *there* can you *become* one of those whom He is not ashamed to call His brothers,³¹ who together are being built into an eternal dwelling place for God by His Spirit.³²

We welcome any who are still thirsty to *come*. ☮

²⁰ Matthew 13:44 ²¹ Colossians 1:13 ²² Acts 5:20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:36-45 ²³ 1 John 2:1 ²⁴ 2 Timothy 2:4 ²⁵ John 18:36 ²⁶ In a recent poll of Christian families concerning how they raise their children, the top goal that parents had was their children getting a good education. Considering the words in Matthew 5:13-16, you may find the following quote surprising: "You might expect that parents who are born-again Christians would take a different approach to raising their children than did parents who have not committed their life to Christ, but that was rarely the case," Barna explained. "For instance, we found that the qualities born-again parents say an effective parent must possess, the outcomes they hope to facilitate in the lives of their children, and the media monitoring process in the household was indistinguishable from the approach taken by parents who are not born again." *Parents Describe How They Raise Their Children*, February 28, 2005, Barna Research Group. ²⁷ 1 John 5:19 ²⁸ John 13:34-35 ²⁹ John 12:26 ³⁰ Acts 26:7 ³¹ Hebrews 2:11 ³² Ephesians 2:21-22; 4:16

Can one accept the world's values, judgments, and political pursuits and be a disciple? The answer is the same today as it was then: No.



THE END OF



Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses... (Romans 5:14)

DEATH'S REIGN

THE COLD GRIP OF DEATH tugs relentlessly at the soul of every man, no matter how lofty his ideals, as if to claim its fair wages in advance of his dying breath. The evil ruler of that dark domain knows the Bible better than any man. Eager to exact the justice due him, he plays with the sin-sick souls of men as a cat plays with a mouse, holding them captive to the fear of death. For some, depression works best, for others, a manic denial of their sorry circumstances, or an unbridled obsession for sex, or money, or recognition — anything to capture the soul, crush the spirit, and silence the objective voice of man's conscience. Thus Satan feeds his insatiable desire for the destruction of God's image in man.

Yes, it is true: All men sin,¹ and the wages of sin is death,² therefore it is appointed to man once to die,

and then the Judgment.³ And yes, it is also true that the Messiah was offered once to bear the sins of many,⁴ and set them free from their captivity to the evil ruler of this world.⁵ So who are the “many” whose sins He bore? “But,” you may object, “He bore the sins of the whole world!” And so it may seem from a casual reading of this popular verse:

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:22, NIV)

But obviously the whole world is not experiencing freedom from Satan's reign — not even many who claim Christ as their Savior. Statistics consistently show that Christians in America are as much in the grip of

¹ Romans 5:12

² Romans 6:23

³ Hebrews 9:27

⁴ Hebrews 9:28

⁵ Colossians 1:13; Romans 6:6-7; John 8:36

the world's vices as the unbelieving society in which are immersed.⁶ How then can they claim to be saved from sin's dominion? For the Apostle Paul wrote of the profound effect in this life of having received the benefit of Messiah's sacrificial death:

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that 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. (Romans 5:17)*

So whoever is still a slave to sin has obviously not received God's abundant provision of grace through Messiah's sacrifice, or His gift of righteousness, regardless of what he claims to believe.⁷ Clearly something more than that kind of belief⁸ is required on the part of the sinner in order for his sins to be borne by the Savior, releasing him from his slavery to sin.

Perhaps the key to understanding what is required can be found in the puzzling statement that Paul began his thought with a few verses back: "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses..."⁹ Why didn't he say, "Yet



So why did the Law require animal sacrifices? The key is found in what happened in the human heart in the shedding of that blood.

death reigned from Adam to Christ"? What did Moses do to bring an end to death's reign? Well, it was through Moses that God gave the law, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system, and through these He provided a way for a man's sins to be atoned for, loosening death's grip on his soul. If we can understand how this sacrificial system worked, then maybe we can understand why Christianity today doesn't work — and where to find the faith that works.

It has been said of old Israel's animal sacrifices that enough blood

was shed to float a battleship.¹⁰ If even a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground without our Father taking notice,¹¹ how much more did He care about the lifeblood of all those animals that served His people? Was it all poured out in vain? The writer of Hebrews taught that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin,¹² yet it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.¹³ So why did the Law require animal sacrifices? The key is found in what happened in the human heart in the shedding of that blood.

The Sin Offering

This was the law of the sin offering for a common Israelite:

If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar... Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. (Leviticus 4:27-31)

Unless you happen to be a goat farmer, it will be very hard for you to put yourself in the place of this Israelite of old who must offer a sacrifice for his sin — a perfect female goat from his herd. Notice that it says

⁶ Depression, and the taking of antidepressants, is as pervasive among Christians as in the broader society. And according to *The Barna Group* (www.barna.org), a conservative Christian research agency, the divorce rate among Christians in America is the same as that among non-Christians. One Barna project director admitted, "We have found that in a lot of ways Christians are not living different lives than non-Christians, when we look at their behavior... It's hard for Christians to understand because it seems contrary to what people think would happen... We would love to be able to report that Christians are living very distinct lives and impacting the community, but ... in the area of divorce rates they continue to be the same." (John Rossomando, "Born-Again Christians No More Immune to Divorce than Others, Says Author," *CNSNews.com*, January 21, 2002) Barna also reports that there is no difference between "born-again" and unchurched adults in the likelihood of viewing pornography on the Internet, or reading magazines or watching videos with explicit sexual content.

⁷ Romans 6:16-18

⁸ John 2:23-25

⁹ Romans 5:13

¹⁰ For a small battleship of 10,000 tons, that would require well over two million gallons of blood.

¹¹ Matthew 10:29

¹² Hebrews 9:22

¹³ Hebrews 10:4

female. It would have been easier if it had said *male*, for you don't get so personally attached to the bucks. You keep a few on hand for breeding, but you don't handle them so much. The extras you kill for meat. But it's the *does* that receive your tender care, for they are the most valuable. They provide milk to feed your family, and they bear kids every spring. And it's the ones without blemish that you value the most, not only because you want to increase your herd with their offspring, but also because they win your heart.

So there you are, an Israelite who has become conscious of your sin, because the Law has done its work of identifying your transgressions.¹⁴ Perhaps you try to push it out of your mind for a time, but eventually the guilt of your sin weighs heavily upon you. Looking over your herd of goats, you pick out the yearlings¹⁵ among the does. They are so sweet and innocent. Knowing already which one is your favorite, you find yourself trying to justify choosing one of the other nice goats, which you reason would also be considered "without blemish" in anyone else's eyes. The priest wouldn't know the difference, but you would, and your God would. You would just be fooling yourself if you didn't offer your best. Your sacrifice would not be acceptable, and your sins would not be forgiven.

So taking your best yearling doe, you head out on the familiar but difficult path to Jerusalem to present yourself to the priest at the Temple. Along the way, the goat's innocent bleating causes you to grieve over your sin and the death it produces, taking its toll in your own life, and prematurely ending the life of this beautiful animal. All too soon you find yourself at the Temple. Kneeling in front of the altar of burnt offerings and laying your hands gently on the head of the goat as the priest

restrains it, you confess your sins in the simple faith that God will transfer your guilt to that innocent animal. Then the priest takes a razor-sharp knife and slits the animal's throat, as you watch helplessly as its lifeblood spurts into the waiting basin with each beat of its heart, until the goat collapses in its last spasm of death. The priest pours its blood out at the base of the altar, and tells you that your sin is forgiven. You realize that your heart is pounding more than the goat's was, and as you walk away, the cost of your forgiveness causes you to cry out to your God to help you overcome the sin that keeps bringing you back to this place.

Was the guilt actually borne by the goat? Of course not. A goat is not a moral creature with an eternal soul that can bear guilt. But the goat, as an innocent and unblemished sacrifice, was a *type* or foreshadow of the One who was to come. He would indeed bear the sins of all whose faith was expressed in giving their best in obedience and childlike trust, along with the sincere and complete confession of their sins. Our Father,

seeing the honest and sincere heart of the offerer, covered his sins until the time when Messiah would come to give His life as the culmination of all the sacrifices offered in sincerity, and to release these captives waiting in "Abraham's bosom."¹⁶

The Scapegoat

The sacrifice for personal sins was not the only type that looked forward to Messiah. Each year on the Day of Atonement, two male goats were chosen for a special kind of sin offering — for the sins of the whole nation. The high priest would kill the first goat in the customary way for a sin offering, but the second goat he presented live:

And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man



¹⁴ Romans 3:20; 5:13; 7:7

¹⁵ Numbers 15:27

¹⁶ Luke 16:22; Ephesians 4:8



who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21-22)

This is where the term *scapegoat* comes from. It became the custom in Israel that when the second goat was released, all the people would curse it, hurling insults, derision, and scorn upon the poor animal as it fled the angry mob, only to meet certain death by wild animals in the wilderness. It is not hard to see how this goat also foreshadowed what would happen to Messiah at the hands of His own countrymen:

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high

priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. (John 11:49-51)

Just as happened to that innocent scapegoat, the Jews heaped their scorn and derision upon the innocent man, Yahshua, the Messiah sent to save them. They cursed Him and spat upon Him and treated Him shamefully, driving Him outside the gates of Jerusalem to the certain death that awaited Him. Little did they know, they were fulfilling the prophetic significance of all those poor scapegoats that gave up their lives for the nation each year on the Day of Atonement.

The Passover Lamb

Probably the most familiar Old Testament foreshadow of Messiah's sacrifice is the offering of the Passover lamb, which the Apostle Paul makes explicit reference to:

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival,

not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

Indeed, according to John's Gospel, Yahshua died on the cross at the same time as the Jews were killing their Passover lambs,¹⁷ and ironically, the chief priests petitioned Pilate to break His legs so that He would die¹⁸ and be taken down from the cross before evening, so as not to defile their ritual observance of the Passover.¹⁹ But He had already died from the crushing weight of our sins which cut Him off from His Father,²⁰ so it was not necessary to break His legs, even as a Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken.²¹

For the Israelites of old, the Passover lamb was an expression

¹⁷ John 19:14; Exodus 12:6

¹⁸ A person being crucified was unable to breathe unless he could push himself up with his legs, taking the strain off his chest.

¹⁹ John 19:31

²⁰ Matthew 27:46,50; Isaiah 53:10-11

²¹ John 19:36; Exodus 12:46

of their utter trust and dependency upon the God of Israel to deliver them from death. On the 10th day of the first month,²² each household was to take from their flock their best yearling male lamb, one without blemish, and “keep” it close to them until the 14th day:²³

*...and you shall **keep** it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. (Exodus 12:6)*

The Hebrew word translated as “keep” in this verse is translated as “become” or “come to be” almost everywhere else it is used in the Old Testament. The implication was that they would become very attached to this sweet lamb so that they would really suffer to take its life at the end of that 14th day. In tears they would put its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their house, and eat its roasted flesh with bitter herbs safe inside their house, trusting that the death angel would see the blood and pass over them.²⁴

The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:13)

Their deliverance from the slow death of bondage in Egypt and the immediate death of their firstborn offspring would not come without shedding the blood of an innocent

animal. On the scale of things, it was a small price to pay for their freedom, but in order for it to be acceptable and effectual it required their utter sincerity and unflinching obedience. Any who failed to choose their best lamb, or failed to let their heart pity it, also failed to receive the salvation they tried to weasel out of God, for God is not mocked.²⁵



Shut the Doors!

Over 400 years before the Messiah walked the dusty roads of Palestine, the prophet Malachi cried out to the backsliding nation of Israel,

“When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept it or show you favor?” says the LORD of hosts... “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not

kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will not accept an offering from your hand.” (Malachi 1:8,10)

After Malachi’s death, no prophetic voice was heard in Israel until the days of John the Baptist, four centuries later. Although the Levitical priesthood continued to go through the motions of offering the ritual sacrifices in the Temple, most of that blood was shed in vain. But finally, in the fullness of time, our Father found a handful of sincere Israelites who were looking for the consolation of Israel, longing for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them from their bondage.

Through a miracle conceived in the heart of God before time began, a poor Hebrew virgin named Miriam²⁶ became pregnant and gave birth to a child whom she was told to call *Yahshua*, which means “Yahweh’s Salvation,” for He would save His people from their sins.²⁷ He was the “only begotten” Son of God in that the seed that caused conception in Miriam’s womb was a pure human seed preserved by God from before

the Fall, not the fallen seed of Adam through her betrothed husband Yoceph.²⁸ Therefore *Yahshua* did not inherit the sin nature common to all who are descended from Adam.

The Lamb of God

When John the Baptist first saw *Yahshua* coming down to the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit spoke through him the prophetic words, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”²⁹ Those words would echo in the minds of sensitive

²² That is, the first month of the *Hebrew* calendar, which was the beginning of spring.

²³ Exodus 12:3-6

²⁴ Exodus 12:7-8

²⁵ Galatians 6:7

²⁶ Or *Mary* in English.

²⁷ Matthew 1:21

²⁸ Or *Joseph* in English.

²⁹ John 1:29

THE END OF DEATH'S REIGN

ones who witnessed the willing sacrifice of His life on the cross only a few years later. Indeed, this man, Yahshua of Nazareth, was to be the fulfillment of all the sacrifices offered in faith by sincere Israelites since the Law was given through Moses.

Not only was Yahshua born without blemish, but He lived His entire life in unbroken communion with His Father in heaven, doing all the Father's will, not once succumbing to any temptation. He never took a thought for Himself, but instead was always concerned for others, loving even those who hated Him, even to His dying breath. That is why the Father loved Him so much.³⁰ He was the very best that the Father had to give, which is why the most famous verse in the Bible is so significant:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

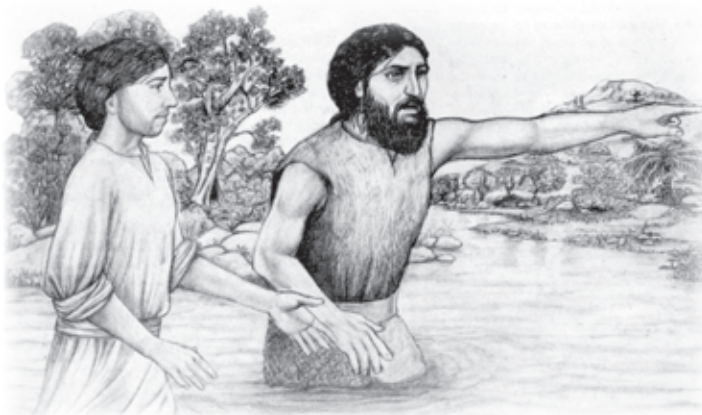
God did not expect His people to do what He was unwilling to do Himself, therefore He did not withhold His very best — His beloved, only begotten Son with whom He had sweet communion — but gave Him to be slain as a sacrifice for our sins.

Like all the sacrifices sincerely offered before Him, Yahshua was an innocent lamb without blemish, but unlike all those sacrifices, He had a human soul that could actually bear the guilt of all who would “lay their hands” on Him. Therefore, in the last moments of His life, the guilt of all the sins that had been confessed by sincere Israelites as they laid their hands on the heads of their sacrificial lambs was placed upon Him, along

³⁰ John 10:17; Mark 1:11

with the guilt of all the sins confessed by His true disciples up until the day of His return. He literally *became* our sin,³¹ and His Father, from whom Yahshua had never experienced one moment's separation, turned away from Him.³²

It was the weight of our sins and the separation from His Father that finally snuffed out His life, not the excruciating physical suffering on the cross. Although His body was



When John the Baptist first saw Yahshua coming down to the Jordan River, he spoke the prophetic words, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

placed in the grave, His soul was put to grief in Sheol,³³ the realm of death, a place of torment³⁴ where for three days and three nights He paid the full wages of our sin.³⁵ When Death had exhausted its fury on Him for the guilt of our sins, it was no longer possible for Him to be held by its power.³⁶ That is when His soul and spirit returned to His body,

³¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-12

³² Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

³³ Isaiah 53:10

³⁴ Luke 16:28

³⁵ Matthew 12:40

³⁶ Acts 2:24

which was waiting without decay in the grave,³⁷ and He rose triumphant over Death.

The Witness of the Resurrection

So after the untold millions of gallons of innocent blood shed by sacrificial animals, and after the Father's heart-wrenching sacrifice of His beloved Son, and after Son's unimaginable suffering in death on our behalf, what should be the outcome? Will Yahshua see the fruit of the anguish of His soul in death and be satisfied?³⁸ What is the credible witness of His resurrection? Where are those whose life of love and unity is a living testimony to the end of death's reign? They could be found in the first century:

The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one

claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common. And with great power they gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:32-33)

They can also be found today, not among the 37,000+ denominations of Christianity, but at the addresses listed on the back of this paper, where all have truly laid their hands on the Lamb of God and obtained the forgiveness of their sins. The love of Messiah controls them, because they have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.³⁹ This is eternal life, and it begins as soon as death's reign comes to an end. ♣

³⁷ Acts 2:27,31

³⁸ Isaiah 53:11

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Fascination

He knew that no man had ever made it through the ordeal. Like an obstacle course through a desert, each hurdle, each almost insurmountable obstacle tested whether he would win the prize that held his heart spellbound. Each day the sun came up and each night it set brought him closer. Nothing could hold him back — neither fire, nor water, nor test after test after test. Like a man in the twilight working feverishly to finish before nightfall, he raced on, drawn by his love for something more precious than life itself.

What was it? Wealth? Fame? Power? Pleasure? Were these what claimed his heart's energy? Or was it something deeper, longer lasting, something living and eternal? It had to be. For he knew, as men have always known, that once this brief life on earth is over, we face an age so long that no one, not even the wisest among us, can grasp more than a tiny piece of it. Here we live our few short years that make all the difference where we will be forever. If he could complete the ordeal, if he could run the course, then he would not be alone. Others would follow, ones like him who would be with him in that unending future.

On the last day he faced his final obstacle. Death himself had come to test him. Like a scapegoat¹ thronged about by those eager to cast their sin upon it, he passed through a gauntlet of his own people, a crowd lining the streets, hurling abuse and scorn and curses. Beyond that came a second, more dreadful torture. All his spiritual enemies had gathered round and formed a gauntlet, too:

¹ Leviticus 16:21-22



two long rows of savage beasts armed with long rods, swinging at his back as he passed between them — to break his spirit, to cause him to give up, to drive him to his knees, and into the ground, and down into death.

Like the scapegoat wandering around in the wilderness until thirst or hunger or wild animals killed it, he took the sins of the whole world far away into the fiery darkness in the core of the earth. In that wild landscape he finished the agonizing ordeal. In a tossing sea of volcanic sulfur and molten stone he received the storm of Heaven's full wrath against sin. Like a helpless victim drowning in the flood, he passed through a suffering too great for us to understand. A universe of hurt and shame, of unpayable injuries and ruined lives, of corruption and perversity was paid for, one crime at a time, in that brief three-day eternity. Finally it ended!

What had given him the strength to go on and on? Love, for certain; only love grants such strength to endure. But wasn't

there something more? Something else that had captured his heart and was the center of all his attention? What could have fascinated him so?² Who was it?

It could only have been those who would follow him and be like a bride married to him. They were the reason why he felt compelled to die. He wanted to save them from the horrible agony of unending death. He knew that once they heard what he had done for them, they would respond to his love with the same fascination he felt toward them. They would willingly give up everything for his sake — family, career, wealth, ambitions, dreams, comforts, even their very own life and interests.³ This sacrifice, on their part, would come from their genuine response to his sacrifice, and would bring about a new nation of twelve tribes. Though his ordeal is over, hers is yet to come. Through all the labor that will take place, she won't lose heart, for he is her fascination. ☛

² Matthew 13:44-46

³ Luke 14:33



The Unshakable Certainty

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” thundered Yochanan, son of Zechariah, as he stood waist-deep in the Jordan River and watched the religious leaders of Israel gather on the riverbank.¹ It wasn’t what they wanted to hear, nor were they expecting it. After all, they were God’s people, weren’t they? So why this scathing rebuke?

It was obvious to Yochanan that the ax was already laid at the root of their fruitless branches — the time for reform had passed. The tree was dead, and Yochanan had been born for the very purpose of pronouncing it so, and preparing the way for the Messiah, as his father had prophesied,

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79, ESV)

Zechariah, an aged priest at the time of his son’s birth, had known well the condition of Israel. His people were in dire need of salvation, for in spite of their great heritage they were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. His heart ached for his people. And in the thirty years since he had spoken

those words, the darkness of their fallen religion had only increased. How Zechariah’s heart would have pounded if he could have seen and heard his son that day.

But when Yochanan saw Yahshua² of Nazareth, whom he knew to be the Messiah, coming down the riverbank toward him to be baptized, his confidence was shaken. Who was he to baptize the Messiah? His objection received only the cryptic response, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” At that, he immersed Yahshua into the muddy waters, and as He emerged, Yochanan saw what appeared to be a dove alight upon Him, and heard a voice from heaven saying, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”³

Why did the Messiah Himself need to be baptized? And why did the Father speak those words audibly to His Son as soon as He emerged from the waters? The answers to these questions touch the very nature and purpose of the Son of God — His

¹ Matthew 3:1-17 is one account of the ministry of the man commonly called “John the Baptist.” ² *Yahshua* is the Hebrew name which is commonly rendered as *Jesus* in English. See page 63 for a more in-depth explanation. ³ Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

humanity and divinity. In past centuries many have died over questions such as these, and even today there are some who would call for our blood, if they could, for writing what you are about to read. But for those who love the truth, these words will ring true and answer some of the deepest questions of your heart.

God or Man?

It is a well-established doctrine in Christianity that Jesus is both fully God and fully Man, but what exactly does this mean? What are the practical implications for those who look to Him as their Savior? Most of us have grown up with the image of baby Jesus with a halo on his head, and pictures of a striking, handsome adult Jesus. Even the typical pictures of the crucifixion show a fair-skinned, unblemished man with a little slit in his side and a placid expression on his face. Who can identify with such a Jesus, so beautiful in his perfection, unaffected by sufferings?

But the scriptures give quite a different picture. They tell of a man who was physically unimpressive,⁴ the son of a poor Hebrew woman,⁵ who for most of His life worked as a carpenter.⁶ Although He was miraculously conceived, few people took notice of this fact. And although there are fanciful things written about Him in apocryphal writings, the Bible gives only a small but essential glimpse of His upbringing.

His family had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover and discovered on their way home that Yahshua was not in their company. Evidently He was a trusted son whom they assumed was serving in some way amongst their caravan, perhaps helping care for the animals. They returned to Jerusalem and searched for several days before they found Him in the

Temple, amazing the teachers with His understanding of the scriptures. He seemed surprised that they hadn't known where to find Him, and they were equally surprised by His question, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Although His parents knew that He was destined to be the Messiah of Israel, clearly they did not expect Him to come into that role so young, nor did they understand what it entailed. But this brief snapshot of His life shows His fascination with the scriptures and how He gave Himself to the



You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased

task of understanding them. This story begins and ends with two similar statements that show a progression taking place:

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. ... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:40,52)

Yahshua was not born with the awareness of who He was or what lay

ahead of Him. He was born a human baby just like any other healthy baby, except for two invisible qualities: first, that He had not inherited Adam's fallen nature,⁷ and second, that His human spirit was one with the divine Spirit.⁸ Neither of these differences from the rest of humanity would be readily apparent, however, in a newborn baby. The effects of the Fall take time to be manifested in human babies, and the soul's awareness of the spiritual realm also takes time to develop. So although He must certainly have been a remarkably peaceful baby, He was yet a baby, with a baby's soul — intellect, will, and emotions. From that point He grew, both physically and in the maturity of His soul.

Soul and Spirit

Human beings are spiritual creatures. A man's soul is like the sails on a ship, designed to be filled with a spirit just as a ship's sails are filled with the wind, so as to propel his life on a course. The human spirit (distinct from the soul) was designed as his vital connection to the Spirit of man's Creator, the means by which man (male and female) could orient his soul so as to be filled with that Spirit. Adam was created with this vital connection intact, with the infinite potential of having his soul (intellect, will, and emotions) fully available to his Creator so as to fulfill his created purpose. But when Adam fell, that vital connection was severed. Man's spirit lay dormant, and his soul lay vulnerable to whatever spirit he was exposed to, just like a ship adrift in the sea.

There are both good and evil spirits at large on the earth. The good spirits have commonly been called *angels*, while the bad have been called *demons*. They are both normally invisible; just like the wind, their presence can only be discerned by their effect. Most

⁴ Isaiah 53:2-3 ⁵ Luke 2:24 shows that Joseph and Mary gave the offering permitted in the Law (Leviticus 12:8) for those who were too poor to offer a lamb. ⁶ Mark 6:3 ⁷ The ovum in Mary's womb had been fertilized by a preserved pure human seed, untainted by the fall of Adam, miraculously implanted in her womb by God. This is implied by Luke 1:35, and confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:45, where the apostle Paul calls Yahshua the second or last *Adam*. Just as the first Adam was created sinless, so the second Adam was born in that same pure state, unaffected by the first Adam's fall. ⁸ The eternally existing Word of God (John 1:1), who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was "enfleshed" (John 1:14) in the human body prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5) in Mary's womb. This is the miracle called *incarnation*. In John 18:37, Yahshua spells it out: "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world..." A human son *was born*, and in the same event, the eternally existing, divine Word of God *came into the world* to dwell in that human son.



The Son of God continually astounded the religious leaders of His time. Yet His teaching, as one with authority, didn't come from a vacuum:

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. ... He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:40,52)



people are not sensitive enough to realize when they are being propelled by a spirit, and some even deny their very existence. But spiritual creature that he is, a man's soul is always being affected by spiritual forces. Fortunately, he has a conscience by which he instinctively knows good from evil. The conscience is like a compass by which a man can orient his "ship" so as to spill an errant wind from his sails, or to fill them with a fair breeze, according to where he wants his life to go, or what effect he wants it to have on others. But the tragic reality is that man's fallen inclination to satisfy his short-sighted selfish desires makes him at best an imperfect helmsman and at worst a menace to all afloat on the "sea" of life. As a result, all men's souls are ravaged and in eternal peril.

Son of Man and Son of God

Enter the Son of Man, conceived by means of an unfallen human seed and possessed of a human spirit vitally connected, indeed fused together with the Spirit of His heavenly Father. His soul, as it developed and matured, was always sensitive to that Spirit, fully yielded to the divine Word within Him. It was not that He had no choice in the matter. He had a free human will with which He had to make choices, just as any human being. He had to face the temptations common to all men, and overcome them by the strength of His communion with His Father. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes this fact:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same... Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him... (Hebrews 5:7-9)

These verses are meaningless if He was not fully human, having a free will by which He could choose to obey or disobey both His earthly parents and His heavenly Father. It says He *learned obedience* through what He suffered. It does not mean that He was ever rebellious and had to suffer the consequences, for He did not ever sin, but His obedience was perfected as He gave Himself to it. It

was not an effortless matter for Him to overcome temptation. All His life, from His childhood until the day He died, He suffered greatly to make the right choices, to deny what would be pleasant or comfortable to His flesh when it was in conflict with the will of His earthly parents as a child, or His heavenly Father as an adult. As a child, the temptations that came to Him and the suffering required to resist them were those common to children. But as He grew up, the temptations were greater and the suffering greater. He increased in His capacity to give Himself to the suffering and surrender His will to His Father's will.⁹ This was the *learning*¹⁰ that prepared Him for the greatest suffering of all — the cross and the agonies of death. It was out of love that He gave Himself to His suffering.

For the Joy set before Him

The Spirit that was in Him bonded Him to the heart of His Father and gave Him the courage and determination to fulfill His purpose. But just as overcoming temptation wasn't automatic for Him, neither was it automatic or effortless for Him to understand who He was or the cause for which He was born. He began life as a human baby, and His mind at birth was ready and waiting to be filled, just as that of any other human baby. He did not have a "crystal ball" with which to see into the future. Even in the last days of His time on earth He did not know the day or the hour when He would

⁹ Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42 ¹⁰ The Greek word translated as *learned* means to increase; to learn by use and practice.

return; only the Father knew that.¹¹ But what He clearly did know by that time was “everything in the Scriptures concerning Himself.”¹²

Yahweh, the God of Israel, very carefully selected the best possible mother and foster-father to raise His Son. He chose the most humble and most spiritual man and woman from the line of David out of the small remnant who were truly “waiting for the consolation of Israel.”¹³ He sent His chief messenger, the angel Gabriel, to prepare both Miriam and Yoceph¹⁴ for the responsibility that was being given to them, making it perfectly clear to them that this miraculously conceived child entrusted to them was destined to be the Messiah.¹⁵

But far from being puffed up or boastful about their Son’s destiny, they quietly shouldered the awesome responsibility to raise Him in a way that would help prepare Him for that destiny. Surely they filled Him with the stories of their people: of the faith of Abraham and the promise made to him; of his sacrifice of Isaac; of Jacob and his twelve sons; of their deliverance from Egypt; of Moses and the Law; of the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle and the sacrifices; of the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan; of the judges and kings of Israel; of the words of the prophets and the consequences of not heeding them, and of course the wisdom of the Proverbs. And surely as Yahshua learned to read the scriptures for Himself, He filled His soul with them, praying earnestly for the wisdom and insight to understand their meaning, struggling to know who He was and what the prophets had spoken of Him. The divine Spirit in Him revealed to Him who He was very gradually as He matured and as He earnestly sought to know His Father’s heart and mind. That is how the Spirit is with all His own people — He hides Himself so that they will diligently seek Him, just as King David taught his son Solomon:

“As for you, my son Solomon, know

the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9)

Yahshua also observed the troubling realities of life among His people. He saw the grinding poverty of many, and the callous disregard of it by the wealthy few who were often among the religious elite. He saw the lame and blind animals the merchants were selling in

It was not an effortless matter for Him to overcome temptation. All His life, from His childhood until the day He died, He suffered greatly to make the right choices

the temple courts, and observed who bought them. He took note of the long and pretentious public prayers of the Pharisees, and the humble masses of the common people, like sheep without a shepherd, longing to be led out of the futility of their lives.

Set like Flint

Compassion for His people and the compelling urgency of the Word of God welled up in His soul in steadily increasing measure and clarity over the years that He labored as a carpenter in Galilee, waiting for the fullness of time. When He heard that Yochanan had begun preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight,” echoing the words of the prophet Malachi,¹⁶ His heart began to pound. “Was this the time? Was He really the one?” Many “messiahs” had come and gone before Him. All had thought that

they were Israel’s liberation, but proved to be just thieves and robbers, leaving the people drowning in disappointment and despair. Was He ready to walk the prophetic path that lay before Him? He was under no illusion as to where it would end. The words of the prophet Isaiah were engraved in His heart:

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isaiah 53:3-8, ESV)

Having made His decision, Yahshua walked down the banks of the muddy Jordan River, His face set like flint¹⁷ to accomplish the purpose for which He was born. His countenance bore the mark of that inner struggle and the determination of His soul. He had us in mind. In the Jews who came to be baptized by John, the Law had done its full work — they came because of their sense of sin and guilt, which the ritual sacrifice of the blood of goats could not extinguish. Sin drove them to the voice of hope. They felt their need for God and the forgiveness of God, for freedom from the consciousness of sin and guilt.¹⁸ In His baptism, Yahshua identified Himself with sinful man; He

¹¹ Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7 ¹² Luke 24:27 ¹³ Luke 2:25 ¹⁴ “Mary and Joseph” in English. ¹⁵ Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 1:21

¹⁶ Matthew 3:2-3; Malachi 3:1

The Unshakable Certainty

took upon Himself their sorrow, their contrition,¹⁹ their search for God, and became one in heart with the men He came to save.

To every man comes the moment within his heart and soul of a little shiver of doubt, a faint question mark, the terrible feeling that he may be mistaken, the grim possibility that he may be on the wrong road. Yahshua's baptism was the moment when the last of these questions perished forever. As He emerged from the waters, the voice that He most desired to hear rang out loud and clear, audible for the first time to His natural ears, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."²⁰ In that moment He knew in the deepest recesses of His heart that His Father was God and He was His Son. He received the utter conviction of the approval of His Father, of the certainty of His will for Him — the unshakable certainty that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, as revealed in the Prophets.

It was not for the sake of the crowd that His Father spoke in an audible voice, but to confirm in His beloved Son the absolute truth of all that He had understood in His years of preparation, and to give Him the unshakable certainty that He was on course to do His Father's will. His preparation was over and the task had begun. The Holy Spirit rested upon Him like a dove to empower Him for all that lay ahead of Him, beginning with the first test:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry... (Luke 4:1-2)

It was no accident that the first challenge from the evil one was to His very identity: "If you are the Son of God..." He needed the unshakable

certainty of who He was in order to endure this testing. Had He given in to the evil one's taunting to seek His own comfort or glory, He would have sinned and disqualified Himself from being the sacrifice for our sins. Instead, by maintaining His communion with the Holy Spirit even at the end of His physical strength, He overcame the persistent temptations of the evil one, and when He had passed the test in the wilderness, angels came to nourish and strengthen Him.²¹

It was no accident that the first challenge from the evil one was to His very identity: "If you are the Son of God..." He needed the unshakable certainty of who He was in order to endure this testing.

The test was real, with the real possibility of failure. It was not a performance by God masquerading as a man. It was the very real suffering of a very real man who overcame through the spiritual communion He maintained with His Father in heaven based on the unshakable certainty that He was a son doing His Father's will. That is how He lived His entire life, and that is how He expects His followers to live their lives, overcoming by the means of grace He opened up for them.

Because He overcame as a man, He was able to take man's place in death. On the cross He said, "It is finished."²² He had finished the course²³ He had begun at His baptism, having maintained vital communion with His Father, never committing sin to His dying breath. Never once did He have a complaint against His Father. He

knew who He was and what He was to do. Then, in the final moments of His life, the full weight of our sins came upon Him.²⁴ In that instant, His Father turned His face from Him for the first time in His life. He cried out, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME!" Then He went into death — as a man, alone, without the help of His Father — which is exactly what awaits all who die without a sacrifice for their sins. As gruesome and terrible as His dying on the cross was, it was in death, which is unimaginably worse, that He actually paid for man's sin.²⁵

His unblemished life was an acceptable sacrifice, the spotless Lamb of God that paid for our sins.²⁶ Just as He took identity with us in His baptism, utterly committing His life to die for us, so also in our baptism we must be united with Him in His death,²⁷ utterly committing our lives to live for Him.²⁸ Apart from the total surrender and abandonment of our lives, we cannot have the unshakable certainty that we are sons of God who are doing His will by the grace and strength He provides. And apart from that unshakable certainty we will not overcome the temptations of the evil one, but will instead seek our own comfort and glory.

There must be a people who will walk in the same way in which He walked,²⁹ having the same unshakable certainty that He had, in order for the evil ruler of this age to be bound and for Yahshua the Messiah to return and establish His kingdom on this earth.³⁰ Do you long for that unshakable certainty that you are His son, doing His will in His Body on earth? He lives in every place where His people dwell together in unity, lifting up holy hands without wrath or dissension.³¹ That is where He honors His sons who serve Him by the grace and strength He provides.³² ♣

¹⁷ Isaiah 50:4-7 ¹⁸ Luke 7:29-30 ¹⁹ Isaiah 57:15; 53:4 ²⁰ Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22 ²¹ Matthew 4:11 ²² John 19:30 ²³ Luke 13:22,32 (ESV, RSV) ²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6,10,11 ²⁵ Romans 6:23 ²⁶ John 1:29 ²⁷ Romans 6:1-7 ²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ²⁹ 1 John 2:6; Colossians 1:10 ³⁰ Hebrews 10:13; Revelation 19:7; Acts 3:21 — This speaks of the restoration of all things in the next age, after Messiah's return, when the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled, restoring the land to Abraham's descendants, ruled over by Messiah and His apostles from the first century, as He prophesied in Matthew 19:28.

³¹ 1 Timothy 2:8; John 17:20-23 ³² John 12:25-26

THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,¹ which makes sense out of the angel's message in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name Yahshua [*Yahweh's Salvation*], for He shall save His people from their sins."

If you look in an old King James Bible, you will find the name *Jesus* in these two passages:

Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David... (Acts 7:45, KJV)

For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (Hebrews 4:8, KJV)

However, if you look in any modern translation of the Bible, including the New King James Version, you will find that in place of the name *Jesus*, the translators use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the underlying Greek manuscript, the name in both of these verses is — *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the common English transliteration² of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*. Joshua of the Old Testament had the same name as the One called *Jesus* in

the New Testament, for Joshua was the prophetic forerunner of the Son of God, bringing Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *Iesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua.*"

The fact is, the name of God's Son could not even be pronounced as "Jesus" in English until late in the 16th century, simply because there was no "J" sound or letter in English until then.³ The modern letter "J" developed from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a capitalized word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *Iesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *Iesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.⁴



A page from the 1611 Authorized Version (King James Bible). Note the lack of a J in the Savior's name.

¹ *Yah* is the personal name of God, and *shua* is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as *YAH* (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4, KJV ("...by his name *Jah*"), and as most familiar in the word *Hallelujah* ("Praise Yah"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, *Yahshua* says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, *Yahshua*.

² *transliteration* — expressing words of a language by using the characters of another alphabet

³ *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496,1507

⁴ *Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12*

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