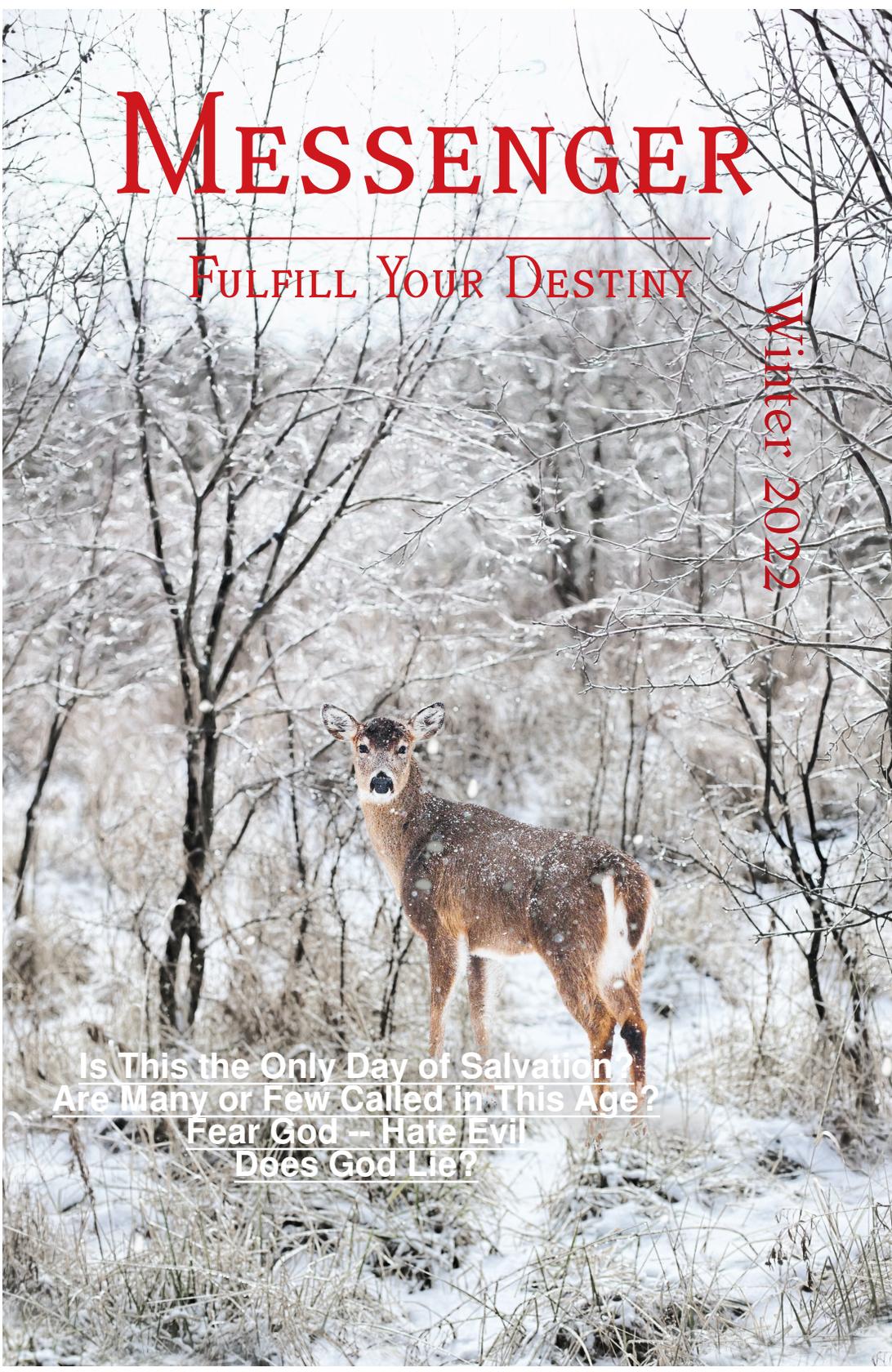


MESSENGER

FULFILL YOUR DESTINY

Winter 2022



Is This the Only Day of Salvation?
Are Many or Few Called in This Age?
Fear God -- Hate Evil
Does God Lie?

MESSENGER

Magazine

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Many have been taught and believe that the question of where and how one will spend eternity is determined irrevocably in this physical life, before it ends in death.

Is that what the Bible teaches? Is this the only day of salvation? Or is God's plan more merciful and inclusive than many have imagined? Are many or few called in this age, and what does that portend for mankind? How should having a proper fear of God affect one's attitude towards evil, as defined in God's word? And does God lie, as some have contended? Find answers in this edition.

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Editor: Rod Reynolds

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Is This the Only Day of Salvation?

by Rod Reynolds

died suddenly of a heart attack in the yard of his home on Wednesday, January 17. He was 56.



Is it true, as has often been taught within professing Christianity, that the question of eternal salvation is sealed at the time of one's death? Are some of your loved ones, simply because they did not profess faith in Christ during their earthy pilgrimage, destined to suffer eternal torment forever?

It's commonly believed among professing Christians that one's eternal destiny is determined by the choices he makes in this lifetime. It's been widely taught that if a person professes faith in Christ as his or her personal savior, then the person "goes to heaven" (or according to some, perhaps "purgatory") at the time of "death." According to a common belief, the dead aren't really dead, because every human has an "immortal soul" that cannot die. So the "soul" continues as a conscious entity, and the person, as a "soul" without a "body," migrates to either "heaven" or "hell," as hell is imagined, a place of fiery torment.

Eventually, according to a common belief, the "soul" will be united with a

resurrected body, at the time of a resurrection. But the ultimate fate of each person who has died will have already been determined, and those not “saved” in this lifetime are damned forever to eternal torment in hell. The “saved,” on the other hand, will remain with God in “paradise,” usually conceived of as heaven.

The vast majority of people in mankind’s history who have lived and died, have never professed Jesus Christ as personal savior, and vast numbers have never or at best barely heard of Jesus Christ, nor had much if any significant knowledge of the true God. The majority of people alive today do not identify themselves as Christians, and according to the doctrine outlined above, are destined for eternal suffering in hell, unless somehow they profess faith in Christ in this lifetime.

This concept, widely taught for many centuries in popular “Christianity,” is summed up in a comment on II Corinthians 6:2 in *Barnes’ New Testament Notes*: **“Now is the accepted time; at some future period it will NOT be. If men grieve away the Holy Spirit; if they continue to reject the gospel; if they go unprepared to eternity, no mercy can be found. God does not design to pardon beyond the grave. He has made no provision for forgiveness there; and they who are not pardoned in this life must be unpardoned for ever.”**

The Bible makes it very clear that saving faith in Jesus Christ founded on a knowledge of the truth is necessary for salvation. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Scripture says, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). In writing to a predominately Gentile congregation of believers Paul wrote that prior to conversion they had been “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). They had been, “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**” (Ephesians 2:12). But, speaking of those who had been converted to genuine faith in Christ, “In Him [Jesus Christ] **you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**” (Ephesians 1:13).

Frequently used to support the idea that one’s eternal destiny is irredeemably determined at the time of death for one living in this age is the following: “For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, **now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation**’” (II Corinthians 6:2).

There is no doubt, as the context shows, that Paul was exhorting the Corinthian brethren to, among other things, take immediate action to be reconciled to God, to not receive the grace of God in vain, to separate themselves from idolatrous practices, to be cleansed, and to seek to perfect holiness in the fear of God (II Corinthians 5:20; 6:1, 14-18; 7:1). The letter is full of pleadings and warnings.

Paul was concerned that some of those associated with the Church in Corinth were unstable, in danger of coming under the influence of false teachers (II Corinthians 11), and that there were many in the congregation who needed to repent of corrupt and unclean practices (II Corinthians 12:20-21).

Seeing the danger, Paul applied words from a prophecy in Isaiah 49:8 in a context somewhat different from that of the original, to encourage the Corinthians to not let salvation slip from their grasp. In a similar manner, but under different circumstances, he exhorted Timothy, "... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, **lay hold on eternal life...**" (I Timothy 6:11-12).

Those in Corinth to whom the letter was originally addressed had heard the gospel proclaimed, they had responded and had professed faith in Christ and had been baptized (I Corinthians 1). But there were serious problems among the Corinthian brethren manifested in carnal behavior, including sexual sins, engaging in idolatrous conduct, and other heretical practices, and false teachings (I Corinthians 5:1; 10:1-14).

Thus the pleadings and warnings in both First and Second Corinthians not to let salvation slip from their grasp. For them, it was a day of salvation, if they took Paul's warnings and exhortations seriously, and repented of their sinful conduct.

God holds us accountable for the decisions we make, and for our behavior. Paul wrote: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10). The phrase "he has done" in this verse is from the Greek word *πράσσω* (*prasso*), which in this case is in the aorist tense, and should be translated "he practices." The Greek word *prasso* means "to practice, i.e. perform repeatedly or habitually" (*Strongs Real Greek Bible Dictionary*).

A person who deliberately and willfully practices sin is following in the path of Satan, and will be judged accordingly. "The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8, New English Translation). The Greek word translated "practices," *ποιέω* (*poieo*) is in the present tense here and implies present and continuing action. It is speaking of one who persists in transgressing God's commandments. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, KJV). "Now by this we know that we know Him [Jesus Christ], if we keep His commandments" (I John 2:3).

Paul, Timothy and Titus, all mentioned by Paul as having been teachers to the Corinthians, had taught them God's commandments (cf. I Corinthians 7:19; 14:37). They are warned in Paul's epistles concerning certain sins being practiced among them, especially idolatry and sexual sins, but others as well, including allowing themselves to be influenced by false teachers (I Corinthians 15:12; II Corinthians 11). Those who are a part of the Church of God, who have knowledge of God's requirements, are being judged, as are others (I Peter 4:17-18).

False teachers abound in the world, and have subverted the Word of God, posing as apostles or ministers of Christ, teaching a false gospel and a false Jesus (II Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-15). A common teaching accepted by many is that Jesus did away with God's commandments, and that Christians are not obligated

to obey them, even though this teaching is contradicted by numerous Scriptures. Jesus himself said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore **breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so**, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but **whoever does and teaches them**, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-20).

In saying he came to fulfill the law, Jesus did not mean that he came to do away with the law, as many suppose, which is not only contrary to the plain meaning of the words he used, as well as the context in which he spoke, but contrary to many other Scriptures as well. A common definition of the Greek word used in the above passage, translated “fulfill,” is to “fill full” (Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* explains the meaning further as used in this context: “...to cause God’s will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God’s promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment.”

To make it clear, one **does not earn salvation** by keeping the commandments. Salvation—eternal life in God’s kingdom—is a gift, and it cannot be earned (Romans 6:23). On the other hand, God does not grant the gift of salvation to those who refuse to submit to and obey his commandments (Matthew 19:17; 7:21-27; Romans 2:2-13, 21-23; 6:16; Hebrews 3:18; I Peter 4:17-18; I John 3:22; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14-15).

We are informed by prophecy that God is going to send Jesus Christ to judge the earth, and all mankind will be affected (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; Revelation 16). Those who come to a knowledge of the truth in this age, and overcome their own fleshly nature, the evil influences of the world, and Satan, through the power of God’s Holy Spirit working in them, Christ living in them through his Spirit, will be resurrected to eternal life at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ, to be given a place as children of God in his kingdom, and of responsibility in the government he will establish over the earth at that time.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14).

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified” (II Corinthians 13:5).

“...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you**,

the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Colossians 1:26-29).

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

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

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6; cf. I Corinthians 15:22-23; I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

But what about the rest, those who for one reason or another did not overcome, but failed to find and obey the truth? The Bible tells us that the vast majority of people in the world, historically and today, have been deceived by Satan. “And the great dragon ... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world...” (Revelation 12:9). Through human lusts, false religion, the deceitfulness of sin, all nations are deceived and are cut off from a saving relationship with God (Isaiah 59:2; II Corinthians 4:3-4; Hebrews 3:13; James 1:14-15; I John 5:19; Revelation 18:23; 20:3).

Are all these vast numbers lost forever? Are they, as some believe, to be tortured forever in an ever burning hell, cut off forever at the end of their physical lives from any hope of salvation?

The good news is, the Bible speaks of a yet future time of salvation, of hope for redemption of those who died in their sins. It's never safe to take for granted God's patience and mercy, and believe one can refuse to do God's will with impunity.

Refusing one's opportunities for repentance in this age will not only deprive him or her of a place in the first resurrection, but may also lead to becoming hardened to the point of being incorrigible. A time of judgment is coming, and those who know God's will and refuse to do it are judged worthy of greater punishment than those who did not have access to such knowledge (Luke 12:47-48). Persistent and stubborn refusal to repent of sin if carried too far will eventually end in the “second death,” through being burned up in a lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

But God is merciful. His desire is to save, not destroy, mankind (I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9). He has allowed human beings to go their own way from the time of Adam and Eve, being subject to Satan's deceptions, and victims of their rebellion against the Creator. But the period of the age of man, cut off from God and under Satan's sway, is drawing to a close.

II Corinthians 6:2 has been mistranslated in most English translations of the Bible. In the Greek in which it was originally written, there are no definite articles

in the verse. It **does not say** what is implied by the errors in translation: “now is **the** day of salvation.” Of the various translations I have consulted, only a few have translated the verse properly, not as “**the** day of salvation,” but as “**a** day of salvation” (as in the Rotherham translation and Young’s Literal Translation).

Paul, writing of the Israelites as a people, reveals that only a relatively small number of elect had obtained salvation, “but the rest were blinded” (Romans 11:7). They were given over to spiritual blindness by their refusal to believe and obey God (Isaiah 29:9-16; Jeremiah 5:21, 23; Ezekiel 12:2; Romans 11:8-10).

Scripture says, “A good understanding have all those who do his commandments” (Psalms 111:10). God had revealed his commandments to Israel from Mount Sinai, had sent them prophets to teach his ways, and call them to repentance. But they refused to listen (Nehemiah 9:9-35; Jeremiah 6:16-17; 18:12; 22:21; 44:16; Daniel 9:10-11). So they were given over to spiritual blindness and were captive to their sins.

“I ask then, **they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not!**” (Romans 11:11, New English Translation). Paul remarks: “They also, **if they do not continue in unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Romans 11:23). It’s revealed that “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26, hyperbole, nearly all, or most). “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins” (Romans 11:26-27).

Scripture pictures a future resurrection to physical life of the people of Israel. The prophecy begins with a valley full of bones of those long dead. God says to the bones, “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:5-6).

God said to the prophet, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’” God says to them, “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it” (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

The Bible reveals a future time when the dead, not only of Israel, but of all nations, will be resurrected to physical life. Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which **all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth**--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [judgment as in several translations, not necessarily condemnation]” (John 5:28-29).

Paul wrote, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits [Greek: firstfruit] of those who have fallen asleep [metaphor for death]. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ **all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order**: Christ the firstfruits [Greek: firstfruit], afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (I Corinthians 15:20-24).

So is revealed a series of resurrections, Christ having been resurrected to eternal life, then the faithful of this age at this second coming, and others later. Further details are given in the book of Revelation. Satan will have been put away, no longer present to lead human beings astray. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (Revelation 20:12-13).

Note that "books" are opened, the Bible will be opened and taught to them. Scripture assures us, "They shall all be taught by God" (John 6:45). Note that the "Book of Life" is also opened, meaning those resurrected and taught at that time will have an opportunity to repent of sin, and be granted eternal life.

That truly will be a "day of salvation" for vast multitudes of the formerly dead who will be restored to life, taught the truth, and given an opportunity to be granted eternal life in God's kingdom at that time.

For further information about subjects touched on in this article, you may read, download, or request the following: "Are the Lost Predestined to Hell?" "Three Resurrections," "The Truth About Hell," "Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?" "What Is Death?"

Readers Comment...

From The Gambia: "Thank you so much for the Messenger Magazine that came to my post office this morning, I really appreciated it.... Also, I want your church to be established in The Gambia in the future."

From Malta: "I have just got the magazine today. Very interesting. Hope that you have placed me on your list to get a copy on regular basis. Thank you very much."

From USA: "...thank you ... for your ... effort to publish the gospel. Your magazine is handsome physically and most instructive and encouraging spiritually."

Note in reply from the editor: I am indebted to the assistance of others, most especially my wife, in our cooperative efforts to proclaim the gospel through the magazine and other venues.

Are Many or Few Called in This Age?

by Rod Reynolds

...said to the servants, Bind him hand
 and feet, and cast him out into the outer dark-
 ness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of
 teeth.
 14 For many are called, but few chosen.
 15 ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how
 they might ensnare him in *his* talk.
 16 And they send to him their disci-
 ples, Herodians, saying, Master, we have heard
 that thou sayest, that it is lawful for a man to
 be true, and to love his father and mother more
 than God.

Perhaps you've heard it said that "only a few" are called in this age? Yet, Jesus taught just the opposite! He said, "many are called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16; 22:14). How is it that *many*, not a few as some think, but many, as Jesus taught, are called in this age?

Does the proclaiming of the gospel constitute a calling to those who hear it, and are they accountable for what they heard, regardless of whether they fully understand it or act on it or not? Is salvation now open to only a few who are specially "picked out" in advance, but closed to all others? Is God going to send calamitous punishments upon billions of people as the end of the age approaches because of a stubborn refusal to repent of their sins, without giving them a genuine opportunity to repent? Does the Bible teach that God plays favorites by "turning a screw" in the heads of some few (as some allege) so they understand the truth in spite of themselves, but deliberately blinding everyone else?

The Bible offers clear Scriptures to answer these questions and additional questions on this subject. If you take the time to carefully examine all the Scriptures referred to in this article you may attain a more complete understanding of God's will for all mankind.

English Definition

Following are some definitions of the English word "call" relative to our purpose:

call. (v.t.) Includes 1. To say in a loud voice; utter or read aloud; announce; proclaim. 2. To summon. 3. To convoke: convene: to *call* a meeting. 5. To summon to a specific work: to *call* someone to the ministry.

– to **call out** 1. To say in a loud voice. 2. To order into service or action;

summon.

call (n.) 1. A shout or cry; loud utterance. 2. A summons or invitation. 3. A signal, as on a bell or a horn. 4. A demand; claim: the *call* of duty. 7. An inward urge to some specific work, often regarded as divinely inspired; vocation.

(*Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1966).

Did (and does) God call Israel by sending his servants to reprove their deeds?

God's word was proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:2). The people of Judah were urged to repent, with consequent blessings (Jeremiah 7:3-7). God called them, the call being issued through the prophets (Jeremiah 7:13, 25-27). In rejecting the calling, the reproof, sent through the prophets, they were refusing to obey the voice of God (Jeremiah 7:25-28). God rejects them because they refuse to hear his word through the prophets and obey him, but continue to do evil (Jeremiah 7:25-30). Compare Jeremiah 35:13-15. While this prophecy was delivered initially to the people of the nation of Judah, its inclusion in the Scriptures means that it's a message for all of us (cf. Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 9:10; 10:11; II Timothy 3:16).

Was there a possibility that Israel might repent at hearing God's word through the prophets?

Could they have repented? Why would God have repeatedly urged Israel to repent if it was impossible for them? Nineveh repented, for a time, at the word of God sent through the prophet Jonah (Jonah 3:1-10). Jesus rebuked the cities that had witnessed the most of his mighty works for their unwillingness to repent, saying that if the same "had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" (Matthew 11:20-21; Luke 10:13). And he said to the disciples he had sent out to preach the gospel, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16).

Jeremiah was told to publicly read God's words from a book in the ears of the people, allowing that, "It may be that the house of Judah will hear... that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jeremiah 36:1-7). At first, some of the leaders feared (Jeremiah 36:16). But when the words were read to the king, he cast the book into the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). Compare Ezekiel 12:2-3.

Did God give Israel the power to choose?

God set before Israel life and good, death and evil. He said, "...choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). Did Israel refuse to answer God's call, refuse to hear his word, and choose that in which God does not delight? (Isaiah 65:12). Was this in contrast to those who tremble at his word? (Isaiah 66:2-5).

How did Israel react to their calling?

They were called but did not answer (Isaiah 50:2; 65:12; 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13; *et al*). In these same verses we are told they did not hear. They stiffened their

necks, and refused to hear, believe, or obey the words God proclaimed through his prophets (2 Kings 17:14-15; Nehemiah 9:26, 29-30; Jeremiah 7:25-26; 19:14-15; Zechariah 7:4-13).

By what means are God's servants empowered to speak His word?

The Spirit of God (Nehemiah 9:30; Zechariah 7:12; cf. Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10; 2 Peter 1:21). The speaking of the true message of God's word is a manifestation of God's Spirit. It is at work in the proclaiming of the message, and the words themselves are, in a sense, spirit (John 6:63). The word of God is the "sword of the Spirit," and is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). While it has the power to convict (Acts 2:37; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25; Titus 1:9), it can be resisted if one hardens himself (Hebrews 3:7-8, 12-13, 15-19; 4:2-3, 7). In stiffening their necks and rejecting the word faithfully spoken by God's servants, the people were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-53).

Did God hold Israel accountable for rejecting their calling by punishing them?

Because they refused to hear the words God sent through the prophets, his wrath came upon them, and they were scattered among the nations (Zechariah 7:12-14; cf. 2 Kings 17:13-20; Proverbs 1:24-32; Isaiah 65:12; 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13-15; 23-34).

Did Jesus call sinners to repentance?

Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Of course, all who heard him were sinners, whether they admitted it or not (Romans 3:23; 5:12). **How did Jesus call sinners to repentance?** "Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel** of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). "Preaching" is from *kerusso* which includes the meaning of herald, proclaim, publish (*Strong's Bible Dictionary*, see definition of call, above). "... saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:15). "Saying" is from *lego*, which can include the meaning of bid or call (*Strong's*). The words for repent and believe are both in the imperative mood, the mood of command. **The command to all who heard Jesus was to repent and believe the gospel.** The one speaking in the imperative, "... expects those addressed to do exactly as he has ordered" (Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, p. 302). The use of the present tense stem implies a continuing repentance and belief (cf. *ibid.*, p. 303). An abiding belief in his message and repentance are the first steps toward a relationship with God (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 8:12; John 1:12; 3:15-18, 36; 5:24, 38; 6:40, 47, 69; 7:39, 48; 17:8; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:8-17; *et al.*).

Paul said the **command to repent** extends to **all men, everywhere, now** (Acts 17:30). **The gospel message is a calling**, as well as a warning and a witness.

Did Jesus send forth servants to call others?

Jesus sent forth messengers to preach (or proclaim) the same message he

proclaimed, repentance and belief in the gospel, and to teach his commandments (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 3:14; 16:15-16; Luke 10:1-10; 24:47).

Are many to be called in this age or few?

Jesus' disciples were commanded to go to all the world and preach (or proclaim, as several translations render it) the gospel to the whole creation, i.e., everyone (Mark 16:15). From time to time this has been accomplished (Acts 1:8; Romans 10:18; Colossians 1:5-6, 23), though not in every age.

In the parable of the "marriage feast" the king sends his servants to "call the called" to the marriage feast; i.e., the kingdom of God (Matthew 22:1-3; *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson; *kaleo*, "call," in both instances). The implication is that repeated calls are made, as is confirmed in the next several verses. God gave Israel repeated opportunities to repent, as he has continued to do with mankind (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 11:6-8; 25:2-8; 29:19; 32:32-33; 35:14-15).

The summary point of the parable is that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14; "are" [Greek: *eis*] is in the present tense, reflecting the reality of the present age). The obvious reason so few are chosen is that most now reject the calling given through the messengers God sends forth (Matthew 22:3-6). But the fact they reject the calling doesn't mean they weren't called.

To be chosen one must be called. But he must also willingly receive the truth, believe it, and be sanctified through faith and by receiving the Holy Spirit, which follows genuine and lasting repentance (2 Thessalonians 2:13; cf. Mark 16:15-16; John 1:11-12; 17:17, 19-20; Acts 2:14, 38; 8:14-15; 11:1, 17-18; 17:11-12; 26:18; Romans 10:8-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:2).

Through the message of the gospel God plants his words in men's minds, as the Israelites had it planted in their minds though Moses' teachings (Deuteronomy 30:14; Matthew 13:19). But those who, having the seed planted, reject it, or fail to act on it, become even more deceived, if anything, than before (Matthew 13:12; Luke 8:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Why is Mankind Blinded?

God has allowed the world to be deceived. But who lied to Adam and Eve? Who chose not to believe God and chose to believe Satan instead? Mankind has been blinded by Satan's deceptions, because Adam and Eve chose to reject the truth and mankind has been following that pattern ever since then (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

As a result, nearly all humans have been shut up together in unbelief (Romans 11:32). The Greek word translated "committed" (or KJV "concluded") is *sugkleio*, which means to shut together (like a net, Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Darby's reads, "God hath shut up together all in unbelief..." Robertson points out, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew." In other words, the world is shut up or trapped in a net of unbelief, **because** of their unbelief (cf. Isaiah 29:9-14). The word "unbelief" here is *apeitheia*, which means both unbelief and disobedience.

Enhanced Strong's Lexicon defines it in part as, "obstinacy, obstinate opposition to the divine will." It's from a cognate word, *apeithes*, which means unpersuadable.

Note that all, hyperbole, virtually or nearly all, are shut up in a net of unbelief, so that he may eventually have mercy upon all. Ultimately God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Allowing the world to stumble along blindly in unbelief and ignorance for the time being is merciful on God's part. The end result will be mercy for all.

For now, however, God has mercy upon whom he will (Romans 9:15, quoting from Exodus 33:19). Is this completely arbitrary? How does God decide on whom he will have mercy? It begins with God's purpose. God chose Jacob over Esau from the womb, because it suited his purpose, which is eventually to show mercy to all [Romans 9:10-13; "hated," is better rendered "loved less" (see Robertson's *Word Pictures*), he preferred Jacob over Esau, cf. Hebrews 11:20]. The wisdom of God's choice was borne out by the behavior and choices of the two men as they lived their lives (cf. Hebrews 11:21; 12:16). Some have been given in this life a greater opportunity for a knowledge of God than others. But with that opportunity comes greater responsibility.

Refusing to hear and be instructed, refusing to take God's word seriously, choosing to sin, hardens and eventually deceives us, if we allow it (Hebrews 3:13). Note how rejecting God leads to being deceived and to greater and greater sin (Romans 1:18-28; Isaiah 5:21; 6:9-10).

God has mercy on those who hear and obey his word (Exodus 20:5-6 ; Deuteronomy 7:9-13; Isaiah 66:2; Ezekiel 33:10-16). Those who harden themselves will be hardened. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (1 Samuel 6:6), and God further hardened Pharaoh's heart by, in part, calling on him to do the right thing and showing him mercy. Pharaoh refused to humble himself before God (Exodus 8:15; 9:34; 10:3). God did not take away his freedom to choose, but through circumstances brought about by God's intervention Pharaoh's already hard heart was further hardened.

God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13-18). However, if we persist in refusing God's word and choose unrighteousness, God will allow us to be blinded by agents of deception (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). When one refuses to accept the truth, what option is there other than to be blind?

God set Ezekiel the prophet as a "watchman" to warn Israel of judgment coming upon them for their rebellion against God's laws. God spoke to Ezekiel, and said to him, "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; **for they are a rebellious house**. Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. **It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house**" (Ezekiel 12:2-3). The World English Bible renders verse three as follows: "Therefore, you son of man, prepare your stuff for

moving, and move by day in their sight; and you shall move from your place to another place in their sight: **it may be they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.**” Note the reason they did not see nor hear. **It was because “they are a rebellious house.”** It is their obstinate refusal to listen to God and the word sent through his prophets that makes them blind to what he is trying to get across to them. God had told Ezekiel, “... the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they will not listen to me: for all the house of Israel are obstinate and hard-hearted” (Ezekiel 3:7, World English Bible). Nonetheless, God through the prophet was (and is) giving his people a chance to repent at his word. “He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 3:27).

Despite the fact that some have greater opportunity to hear the gospel, salvation is open to any who hears and responds in genuine faith (Romans 10:13-21). Paul was sent by Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles, “...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus Christ]” (Acts 26:18). He did this by declaring the message of repentance and faith (Acts 26: 20; Acts 17:2-4; 19:8-10).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life,” said Jesus (John 5:24). “I say these things that you may be saved,” he said (John 5:34).

To Whom Is Understanding Given?

Why did Jesus say to his disciples, “...it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). Jesus answers, “For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

Some have concluded that this verse, especially the phrase, “Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them,” implies that God does not want the people to understand and repent, despite many scripture passages to the contrary. The verse is more clearly translated in some other versions. For example the New International Version renders it as follows: “For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” Or, consider the Bible in Worldwide English translation: The hearts of these people have no feeling. They do not hear well with their ears. And they have shut their eyes. They do not want to see with their eyes. They do not want to hear with their ears. They do not want to understand in their hearts. They do not want to turn to me. If they did turn, I would heal them.”

Adam Clarke in his commentary on this verse remarks that they, “obstinately resisted the truth of God, and shut their eyes against the light.” He goes on to say, “The fault here is totally in the people, and not at all in that God whose... nature is love.” (See our article “Does God Want People to be Deceived?”).

Note the reasons given for the lack of understanding, and note that but for these reasons they *could have* seen, heard, and understood, repented, and been “healed.” (1) Their hearts were “dull,” or gross, fat, callous, insensible. (2) Their ears were hard of hearing. (3) Their eyes *they* had closed. The crowds came out to hear Jesus, but more for entertainment than any serious purpose (cf. Ezekiel 33:30-33). Jesus did not commit himself to the crowds, that is instruct them in the deeper mysteries of the kingdom, because they were not committed to him, and he knew what was in their hearts (John 2:23-25). “Believed” (*pisteuo*) in verse 23 is in the aorist tense, the aspect being undefined, but often implying action at a point in time. For most of them their belief, such as it was, was shallow and fleeting.

The miracles that Jesus did attracted great multitudes (John 6:1-2). When he miraculously fed a crowd in Tiberius, having taught them and worked other miracles which they witnessed, they sought him out after he had departed. Jesus said to them, “...you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26). Having seen the miracles that Jesus worked, having been miraculously fed by him, they said, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” (John 6:30). They heard but didn’t hear, saw but didn’t see. Jesus said to them, “...you have seen Me and yet do not believe” (John 6:36). “Believe” here is in the present indicative, implying an abiding, continuing faith.

Some of Jesus’ disciples left him at that time (John 6:66). But others, especially the twelve, remained. Peter said, “...we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ” (John 6:69).

Because of their belief and commitment the closest disciples were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Understanding and knowledge are given to those who receive and treasure God’s word, hear and apply their hearts to understanding, cry out for it in faith and seek it (Proverbs 2:1-7; James 1:5-6). Truth is for those who are prepared to receive it and live by it (John 8:30-32).

When someone has an opportunity to hear God’s word he has an opportunity to listen, consider what is said, and act on it. Jesus said, “Take care about what you hear. The measure you use will be the measure you receive, and more will be added to you ‘ ’” (Mark 4:24, *NET Bible*). “Turn at my rebuke [i.e., repent]; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Proverbs 1:23; cf. Psalm 111:10; Daniel 9:13; 2 Corinthians 3:16).

Access to the mysteries of God is open now more than ever to those who are willing to receive the truth and act on it in faith (Ephesians 3:8-12). “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27). Paul wrote that the mystery of the gospel is now

revealed to all nations by the commandment of God, “for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25-26; cf. Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 4:17). Those who do not believe the gospel remain blind for now, as God allows (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Does it really make sense that God would demand repentance, yet make it impossible for all but a tiny few, by refusing to “call” the others, if that’s all it takes? Paul wrote of the Gentiles, “They are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Because they are callous, they have given themselves over to indecency for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:18-19, *NET Bible*). The description also fits Israel.

God now calls men to repentance through the preaching and publishing of the gospel. But most are so hardened and steeped in their false beliefs and lawless practices that they are not likely to respond to such a gentle approach. That’s why eventually there will be a tribulation and plagues poured out (Deuteronomy 30:2-7; Revelation 9:20-21). Nevertheless, through the gospel message, some in this age can be saved (Romans 11:13-14; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Whom Does God “Draw”?

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” said Jesus (John 6:44). He went on to say, “And they shall all be taught by God” (verse 45). Jesus further said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself ” (John 12:32).

Nothing in these verses implies God and Christ seek to draw only a few. Indeed, they suggest that God seeks to draw all to Christ. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). But most who heard Christ did not believe, and thus did not have God’s word abiding in them (John 5:38).

How does God “draw” men to himself (or to Christ)? The word translated “drawn” (John 6:44, *(h)elko*), can have any of several meanings depending on how it is used, such as draw, drag, pull or attract (cf. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*). One can be “drawn” by God to Christ, or “drawn” by his lusts to sin (James 1:14 [same word, *(h)elko*, with the Greek preposition *ek*, translated there “drawn away”]; cf. Deuteronomy 30:17; Acts 20:30; Hebrews 7:19).

All will be taught by God, sooner or later, one way or another. That doesn’t mean all will accept the teaching and abide by it. To come to Christ requires a willingness to hear and be taught by God. Those who believe can have everlasting life (John 6:47).

God said of Israel, “I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent” (Hosea 11:4-5; cf. Jeremiah 31:3). Paul asks, “... do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

One way God seeks to draw people to himself is through acts of loving

kindness and mercy, the many gifts and blessings he gives. Surely sending his messengers to call men to repentance is one of the tools God uses to draw men to him. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

But most are not willing to be drawn to God at this time. To such Paul wrote, "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). To those who refused to accept him Jesus said, "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40; cf. Matthew 22:3). Those who refused God's message "rejected the will of God for themselves" (Luke 7:30). Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you," (James 4:8). For one to be "drawn" by God to Christ, to be led to faith and repentance, requires a response on his part appropriate for the enticements God has set before him, for the mercy and goodness God has shown. Now, in this age, God is using gentle methods for the most part to "draw" men to Christ.

He will later send tribulation and other curses, to more forcibly bring men to repentance (Leviticus 26:40-42; Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Ezekiel 20:33-38; 41-43; Hosea 5:15 – 6:1; Zechariah 14:16-19). He will rid the world of Satan and his works (John 12:31; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 20:1-3), and establish a new system where his law is universally taught (Isaiah 2:2-4). Sooner or later, one way or another, all will be taught of God, though not all will accept his terms for salvation.

Whom Would God give to Christ?

Those who were not willing? (John 5:40). Those who did not believe? (John 12:37). Those who would not obey? (John 7:19).

Or would he give to Christ those who would receive him? (John 1:12). Those willing to deny themselves? (Mark 8:34). Those willing to obey? (Luke 6:47-48). Those willing to hear and learn? (Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:45). Those who believe? (John 3:16; 17:6-8). Those who repent? (Isaiah 66:2). Those who abide in his word? (John 8:31; James 1:21-22). Those willing to worship in spirit and in truth? (John 4:23). Those who seek him? (Luke 11:9-13; Hebrews 11:6).

Who Are "The Called"?

Paul in a few Scriptures (e.g., Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 1:24) uses the term "the called" (with the definite article). In these instances the definite article appears to limit the reference to a specific subset. As, for example, "the men" might be used to designate a specific group of men as a subset of "men." This is a common use of the article in both Greek and English. "The called" is not all who have been called, but Paul uses the term to refer to those who have responded to their calling, and are members of the Church. *The Peoples New Testament*

Commentary on Romans 8:28 explains it as follows: “To them who are the called. These have been called by the gospel and have accepted the call. Many others are called Jews and Gentiles, but only those who hear and obey are chosen (Mt 20:16; 22:14). Paul uses the term of the latter class; those who hear and obey.”

What is Ekklesia?

Among the Greeks the word *ekklesia* was used to denote a convened assembly of the citizens of a community. In the Scriptures the word is used of the Church (or a local church assembly), as those called to assemble before God. In order to be a part of the assembly, in either case, one had to respond to the summons.

William Barclay elaborates as follows: “...originally the word does not mean, as is so often stated, a body of people who have been ‘picked out’ from the world. It has not in it that exclusive sense. It means a body of people who have been ‘summoned out’ of their homes to come and meet with God; and both in its original Greek and Hebrew usages, that sense was not exclusive but inclusive. The summons was not to any selected few; it was a summons from the State to every man to come and to shoulder his responsibilities; it was a summons from God to every man to come and to listen to and to act on the word of God” (*New Testament Words*, p. 70).

Who May Come?

While God must draw men before they may come to him, he invites anyone who desires to come to him on his terms. “... let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17, cf. 2 Chronicles 15:2; Isaiah 55:1-3; Matthew 5:6; 11:28-30; Luke 11:9-13; John 4:10).

Did Paul Write That “Not Many” Are Called?

If many are called, what are we to make of the following statement in Paul's letter to the Corinthians: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (I Corinthians 1:26). Actually, the words “are called” at the end of this verse are not found in the original Greek. The words are added in the New King James Version, and the King James and some other translations. A number of other translations more faithful to the original do not add the words “are called” at the end of the verse.

The Darby translation, for example, reads as follows: “For consider your calling, brethren, that there are not many wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many high-born. But God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world,...” (I Corinthians 1:26-27, Darby Bible). Some other versions, such as Young's Literal Translation, use similar wording.

It is true that although many have been called, very few of those esteemed in the world as being extraordinarily wise, or powerful, or of privileged birth, have been among the chosen of God in this world. Just as Jesus said, many are called, but few are chosen, in this age, and very few among those of reputation for worldly wisdom, wealth, power, etc.

A ruler who was very rich was offered the opportunity to join Jesus in his

ministry, but turned down the offer because of the sacrifice it would have required. Jesus said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24). Peter said in response, "See, we have left all and followed You" (Luke 18:28). It's not that a rich person cannot be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, as we have the example of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man, and a disciple of Christ (Matthew 27:57), and others could be mentioned as well. But such are the exception in today's world.

The "calling" mentioned in I Corinthians 1:26 is from the Greek word κλήσις (*klesis*), which is a "verbal noun" (cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). The "calling," in the sense in which this word is used in the New Testament, is the object or condition to which God calls us, having to do with a saving relationship with him, a hope, a destiny, a way of life, etc. (cf. Ephesians 1:4, 18; 4:4; Philippians 3:14; II Timothy 1:9).

Those who respond in a positive way to the message of the gospel, have faith in God, repent and receive the Holy Spirit enter into this "calling," and are among the "chosen" or "elect" of God, destined for eternal life in his kingdom if they remain faithful (Hebrews 3:1; II Peter 1:10).

Note on Acts 13:45-48: "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (verse 48, NKJV), is a misleading translation. Some other translations are even more misleading in how they translate this phrase. As the context shows, many of the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia had opposed and rejected the word of God brought by Paul, and hence had judged themselves "unworthy of everlasting life" (verse 46). Note that this was a consequence of rejecting the message, not something that had been preordained.

On the other hand, a number of Gentiles in the area were receptive to the message and believed. The Greek in the disputed passage reads more literally: "And the Gentiles hearing, were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord, and believed; as many [i.e., the same number, or so, it could be translated] were appointed [or disposed] to eternal life." In the Greek "were" (*ēn*) before "appointed" is imperfect, and should be translated "were," not "had been." The A Conservative Version (ACV) translation of the phrase is: "...as many as were appointed for eternal life believed." The same translation is given in The Revised King James New Testament (RKJNT).

The following are the same except use "to" in place of "for": English Majority Text Version (EMTV), English Standard Version (ETV), New Heart English Bible (NHEB), World English Bible (WEB), and The Common Edition New Testament.

The Living Oracles New Testament (LO) translates the phrase, "as many as were disposed for eternal life, believed."

The Jews involved in this episode were unworthy of eternal life because, motivated by envy, as we're told (Acts 13:45), they refused to believe, rejecting God's word. By contrast, some Gentiles who heard, believed, and hence were "appointed," or set apart, to eternal life; that is, they were converted. They were

set on the road to eternal life because they believed. There is nothing in this passage of Scripture suggesting their belief was the result of God having selected them out beforehand. Compare John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

by Rod
Reynolds

Lying

Wicked
Plans

Raise

Whites

Sowing Discord

FEAR GOD OF
HATE EVIL

PRIDE

HANDS THAT SHED
INNOCENT BLOOD

FEET
THAT RUN
TO EVIL

When God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice to him his only son, Isaac, Abraham obeyed in faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

It was not God's intent that Abraham actually slay his son, but God sought to test the extent of Abraham's faith and see if he indeed had in him the fear of the Eternal (Genesis 22:10-12). Abraham proved that his fear of God was genuine, because he obeyed (Genesis 22:15-18; 26:4-5).

To fear God means to regard him with awe and deep respect, to see him as exalted and holy, just and righteous, to love him without reservation. Such fear

comes from the heart. Because God is righteous and just, the fear of God is to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13). As Christians, we must overcome sin and put it out of our lives. Having a genuine fear of God, as we've described, enables us with God's help to do that. If you truly hate evil you will abhor it and want to put it away from you (Proverbs 16:6).

Do you have the fear of God? We will discuss how that can be determined. One way to test yourself is ask yourself, do I hate what God hates? Do I hate evil?

God does not take a neutral or tolerant stance toward evil. God is merciful to human beings, he extends grace and forgiveness to us despite our evils, but in the final analysis, God hates evil. If we are to please God, if we are to become like God, we must develop the fear of God—we must learn to hate evil as God does.

In Proverbs 6 are named seven specific evils that God hates (Proverbs 6:16).

As we go through these you can test yourself, and gauge how strong is your fear of God.

1) A proud look (Proverbs 6:17).

We've already seen in Proverbs 8:13 that God hates pride and arrogance. Both Hebrew words in that verse, translated respectively pride and arrogance (NKJV), come from the same root, נָחַל (*gâ'âh*), which means to rise or swell (*Strong's Hebrew Bible Dictionary*). Pride and arrogance are a kind of spiritual leaven that are sinful in and of themselves and lead to greater sins.

Pride, including spiritual pride, creates a barrier between the person afflicted with it and God. Often the prideful think of themselves as righteous, as in the parable of the pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14; cf. Matthew 21:31-32).

The proud, even those who claim to know God, do not truly seek God, because their pride gets in the way (Psalm 10:4). They are not easily entreated, and refuse to acknowledge their sins in a fashion that leads to repentance.

Indeed, often the proud not only indulge the flesh, but proudly proclaim their sins (Isaiah 3:9). We live in a world that exults in sin.

God will not endure pride (Psalm 101:5). We must learn to see pride in our own hearts and minds, and hate it, and repent of it (Romans 12:3, 10; Philippians 3:2-8; 1 Peter 5:5).

2) A lying tongue (Proverbs 6:17).

The whole world lies in spiritual darkness because of Satan's lies (Revelation 12:9). He is the father of lies (John 8:44). God is a God of truth, and lying lips are an abomination to him (Proverbs 12:22). It's very important that we strive to avoid



Benito Mussolini sought to restore the glory of the Roman Empire by conquest. His prideful ambition led to the suffering and deaths of millions, and ruin for himself and Italy.

repeating any false report, and that we be found faithful witnesses (Proverbs 14:5).

Lying lips are a fount of all sorts of evil, and lead to and go hand in hand with many other sins (Hosea 4:1-2). Unrepentant liars will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

We must learn to love the truth, and hate lying, and put away lying lips.

3) Hands that shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:17).

Down through history among many peoples it's been a custom to murder the innocent in the name of religion, or simply for the sake of convenience. Israel was told not to adopt heathen customs because it would lead to the murder of their own children (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Both Israel and Judah disobeyed, and eventually they were sacrificing their children to heathen gods, and for these and other sins their land was made desolate and they were sent into captivity (Jeremiah 7:30-34).



Since the U.S. Supreme Court declared abortion a constitutional right in 1973, it's estimated that well over 60 million innocent children have been murdered in this country through legally sanctioned abortion (www.numberofabortions.com).

While these murders have not been committed necessarily in the name of religion, they've been tolerated in our supposedly Christian nation, nevertheless. Many "liberal" churches have actively supported the right to abortion. Whatever the rationale, the cause and the result is the same: hands that have shed innocent blood.

This is only one way in which innocent blood has been spilt in our land, and throughout the world. Race hatred, wars, spousal and child abuse, and criminal activity have resulted in the deaths of untold millions of victims in the history of mankind.

Surely we can learn to hate the shedding of innocent blood, and repent of it to the extent we may be guilty, as Paul did (Acts 22:4; 1 Timothy 1:13).

4) A heart that devises wicked plans (Proverbs 6:18).

In the world that existed before the flood, God saw that left to themselves the hearts of men were evil (Genesis 6:5). The world is evil because the hearts of men are evil.

We must come to see that our own nature is evil, and that with God's help we must fight against and overcome our own corrupt minds (Romans 8:7-8). Each person is responsible to God for living a life of repentance, hating the wickedness that dwells in his or her own flesh, and striving to overcome it though the Spirit of God (Romans 8:12-14). We must set our minds on doing God's will, and put to death the fleshly lusts of the carnal mind (Colossians 3:1-5).

5) Feet that are swift in running to evil (Proverbs 6:18).

When God took Moses up to Mount Sinai to give him the law, in almost no time

nearly the whole lot of the children of Israel turned aside (Exodus 32:1, 7-8). Very commonly humans carelessly and thoughtlessly make decisions that lead them into evil. Running to evil is in our nature, but it's something God hates and we are warned against in many places in Scripture (e.g., Job 31:5, 8; Proverbs 19:2).

Rather than carelessly and thoughtlessly, or greedily, running to evil, we are admonished to give careful consideration to the decisions we make and how we live (Proverbs 4:25). We are not to be drawn along with the crowd into doing evil (Exodus 23:2). The excuse "everybody's doing it" is not impressive to God.



Burned out vehicles in wake of Deli riots in 2020

We are admonished, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). We must not run to evil, but we are to flee sexual immorality, idolatry, and other sins, and pursue righteousness (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:22).

6) A false witness who speaks lies (Proverbs 6:19).

Lying is mentioned twice in this list of things God hates. We must realize how corrosive and corrupt lying is and understand why God hates it so.

We are commanded not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). Every time we say something that is not true we break this command.

Many times innocent lives have been destroyed because of the lies of false witnesses. It was lies about the Jews, for example, that led to the holocaust of World War II. Jesus was murdered partly as a result of the testimony of false witnesses (Matthew 26:59-61).

We must learn to hate lying as God does, and do everything possible to make sure we always tell the truth (Colossians 3:9).

7) One who sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:19).

God wants us to be of one mind with him. When that is lacking, discord is the result (Philippians 2:1-5). As noted in the above Scripture, discord may develop as a result of selfish ambition, conceit, and a lack of interest in the well being of others. It often involves fraud and deceit, and very often slander (Proverbs 6:11-15). "Perversity" (verse 14) could also be translated fraud or deceit (cf. Proverbs 16:28). Note that Moses and indirectly God were slandered with the accusation they were out to kill the congregation of Israel (Numbers 16:13).

Discord results from carnality of mind (1 Corinthians 3:3). The key to peace and unity is in having the mind of Christ. Our fellowship with one another is predicated on our fellowship with Christ and the Father (1 John 1:3, 7). It's the responsibility of the ministry to teach the truth, so that we may come together in the likeness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-15).

We must put away selfish ambition, conceit, fraud, deceit, slander, and carnality of mind, so that we may become one with Christ and with one another.

The fear of God is to hate evil. Do you have the fear of God?

DOES GOD LIE?

By Rod Reynolds

Does God lie? Did Jesus Christ speak in parables to deceive people?

A reader asked for my comment, writing to me, "I know of someone who said that Christ deceived. He was referring to the... parable of the sower and the seed. [He inferred] that Christ used the parables to deceive people so they wouldn't understand." The reader went on to say that some who think of themselves as Christians justify lying if one's motive is to achieve a "good end," for example, "to get the abortion law altered" so there would be fewer abortions."

Should we lie? Should we do evil that good may come?

Jesus often used parables to teach spiritual lessons. The word "parable" is from the Greek *parabole*, from the verb *parabollo* which means literally to throw alongside. A parable, as explained in our article "Marriage Feast Parables," is by definition an analogy, where one thing is compared to another by way of metaphor or figurative speech.

The Bible is full of "parables," or analogies, type and anti-type, symbolic language and devices, from one end to the other. The Old Covenant system, for example, was symbolic of, or analogous to, a greater reality (Hebrews 8:5; 9:9). Parables can be, and in Scripture, often are, used to explain in a clear and concise fashion truths that would be much more difficult to explain without them.

The Bible was written in such a manner that it could be misunderstood, and it often has been misunderstood, not because God "lied," but because people have chosen to be misled and deceived by their own obstinate disbelief, or lack of care in studying the Bible, or in other respects leaning to their own understanding (Proverbs 3:3-5; John 5:38-47). Many have been and remained deceived simply because they have accepted the false traditions they have been taught (1 Peter 1:18). Jesus did not speak in parables to deceive people, but in part, because

they were already blind, and unreceptive to the truth (Matthew 13:13-15). There were no lies in Jesus' teachings.

Even though Jesus did not often fully explain the deeper meaning of his parables to his audiences at the time he spoke to them, he explained them to his disciples. To the apostles he trained during his earthly ministry, and to others who came along later, he gave the instruction: "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). The apostles immediately began proclaiming the gospel message after Jesus had died, been resurrected and ascended to heaven. They taught what he had taught them (Matthew 28:20; cf. Acts 2:42; 20:20, 27). The meanings behind the parables of Jesus are clearly explained in the Bible. Through parables Jesus was explaining truths, details concerning God and his plan of salvation, long hidden from human understanding (Matthew 13:34-35).

Satan, the arch deceiver, and father of lies, is the source of this world's false traditions which have kept most of mankind in spiritual darkness (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4; Revelation 12:9). I explained this in some detail in a sermon titled "Enigma of the Bible" (sermons and articles published by us and referred to in this article are available at our website, cogmessenger.org). You are invited to listen to it, as I go through a number of Scriptures relating to this subject in the sermon. I've also addressed the subject in several other articles and sermons to one degree or another. One of them in which I go into it in some detail is the article "Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called in this Age?," which appears in this edition of *Messenger* magazine. Also the sermon "Mysteries of the Bible" has material pertaining to matters discussed in this article.

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). The truth is for those who are willing to accept it and act on it. God allows those who reject the truth to be deceived. What is left but deception for those who refuse to believe the truth?

"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned **who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness**" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Note that it does not say that God lies to them, but that because they refuse to believe the truth, he sends them delusion, i.e., allows Satan and his agents to deceive them further. I can think of no scenario where resorting to lies would be useful "to get the abortion law altered" so there would be fewer abortions. Lies were and are used constantly, however, to support and promote "legal" abortion (see our article "Murder Is Murder" for examples).

What might help to reduce or eliminate the practice of abortion is exposing the truth about abortion, however. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for

because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light" (Ephesians 5:6-13).

Unfortunately, lying, and the tendency to seek justification for lying, is all too common, even among those who claim to be Christians, or who may be Christians, but are leaning to their own understanding in certain respects, as opposed to being fully faithful to God's word. We don't always need to tell everything we know, but lying is a sin.

There are examples in Scripture of situations where lies were resorted to for expediency in desperate circumstances. Rahab's act of mercy (Joshua 2:1-16), though it involved a lie, was accepted by God (James 2:25). Matthew Henry comments, "This case was altogether extraordinary, and therefore cannot be drawn into a precedent; and that may be justified here which would be by no means lawful in a common case." And he further states, though it was a lie, "...God accepted her faith and pardoned her infirmity. However it was in this case, we are sure it is our duty to speak every man the truth to his neighbour [Ephesians 4:25], to dread and detest lying [Psalm 119:163], and never to *do evil, that good may come of it*, Rom. iii. 8" (*Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* on Joshua 2:1-7). We might note that God could, and most likely would, have delivered the spies without Rahab's lie. But he allowed her to demonstrate her faith in her imperfect way, and thus she and her family were saved.

David's lie to Ahimelech, when he was fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 21:1-2), indirectly led to the deaths of the priests at Nob along with other residents of the city. They were murdered at the command of king Saul, who falsely accused Ahimelech of conspiring against him (1 Samuel 22:9-23).

Though human beings are often guilty of lying, God does not lie (John 17:17; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Revelation 3:14). Jesus was persecuted because he told the truth (John 8:40). I believe it's preferable to follow his example at all times, and seek from him the strength and wisdom to do so. As our reader put it, "...if we need a good or positive outcome, then we need to ask Him for the help and the means to accomplish it! God can accomplish good working through us without us resorting to deceit."

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Does God Lie?

Did Jesus Christ speak in parables to deceive people? Does God want people to be deceived, and does he lie to achieve that end? Or is it Satan who is the deceiver of mankind?

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