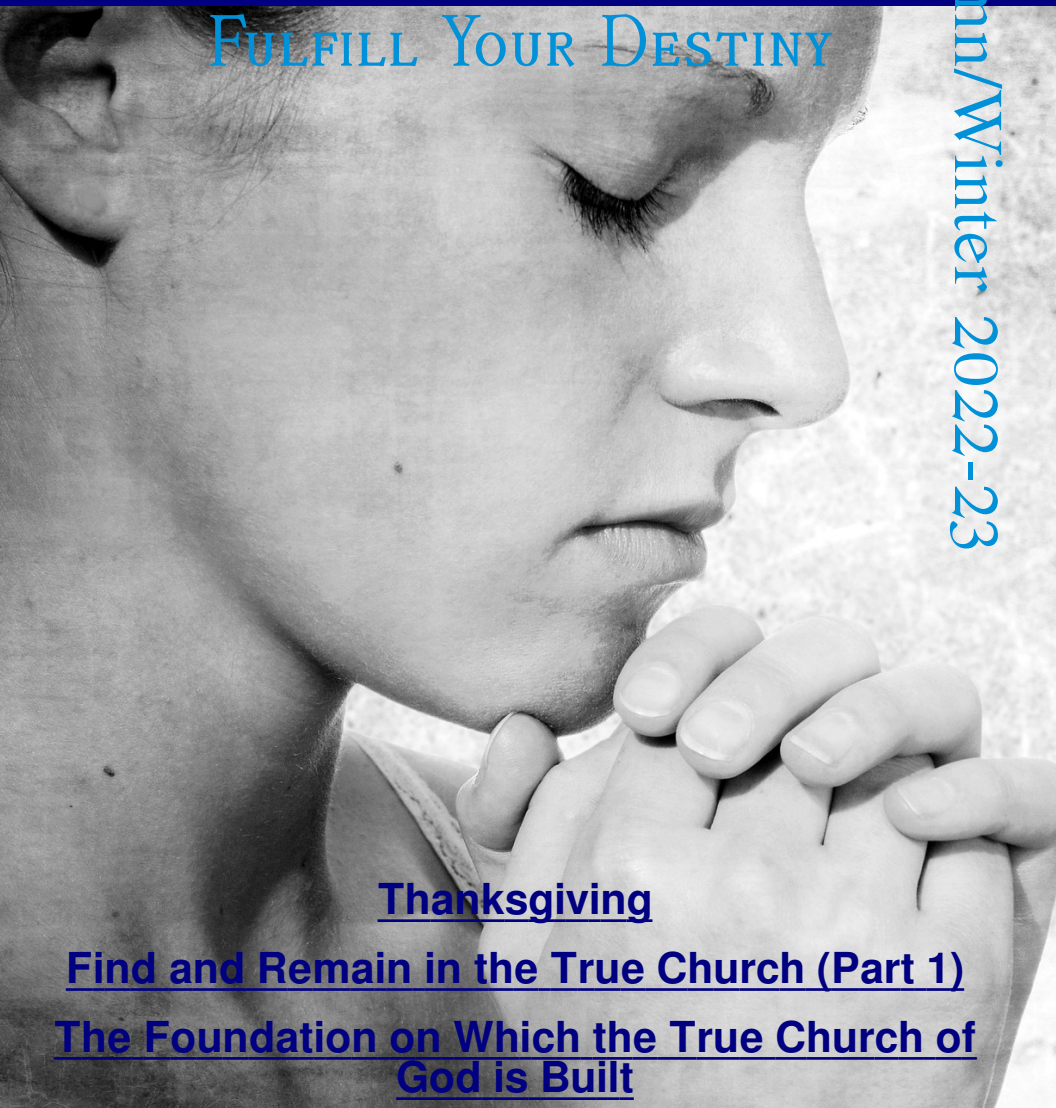


MESSENGER

Autumn/Winter 2022-23

FULLY YOUR DESTINY



Thanksgiving

Find and Remain in the True Church (Part 1)

The Foundation on Which the True Church of
God is Built

What Will You Inherit?

How BIG is the Universe?

Why Did God Choose Israel? (Part 1)

MESSENGER Magazine

Issue No. 22 | Autumn/Winter 2022-23

According to Scripture, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Since all good things come ultimately from God, it's more than fitting that we should offer Thanksgiving to him, as we are admonished in Scripture. The United States has long officially acknowledged God as the source of our extraordinary blessings, but how many among us are truly thankful? As individuals, however, no matter where we are, there's nothing to hinder us from acknowledging God and rendering homage to him as the author of life and source of every blessing. And where is the True Church? How may you identify it? Why did God choose Israel? And what is the inheritance reserved for the faithful?

Featured Articles

Thanksgiving | 1 / Find and Remain in the True Church (Part 1) | 6

The Foundation on Which the True Church of God is Built | 15

What Will You Inherit? | 17 / How BIG is the Universe? | 26

Why Did God Choose Israel? (Part 1) | 30

Messenger Magazine is published by the Messenger Church of God.

Editor: Rod Reynolds

This publication is distributed free of charge. In his instructions associated with preaching the gospel, Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give."

This publication is not to be sold. No part of this publication may be reproduced except in its entirety, other than brief quotes used for reference.

Entire contents copyrighted 2023 by Messenger Church of God (and/or authors of individual articles).

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are referenced from the New King James Version™ Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. (see <https://creativecommons.org/> for details).

This work is supported by the freely given tithes and offerings of the members of the Messenger Church of God, its co-workers and supporters. There is no obligation associated with receiving or subscribing to the magazine, although voluntary contributions are gratefully received.

You may subscribe to the magazine by sending your request to:

subscribem@cofmessenger.org

or online at www.cofmessenger.org/messenger-magazine

Or

Messenger Magazine

PO Box 619

Wentzville, MO 63385-0619

or by telephone: 573-722-4253

Donations may be sent to the same address or may be made online. See our website www.cofmessenger.org for details.

For further encouragement, insight, and instruction from the perspective of the Bible, its doctrines, history, and prophecies, and commentary on current affairs and healthful living, visit our website:

www.cofmessenger.org

Thanksgiving

By Rod Reynolds



We are admonished throughout the Bible to offer thanksgiving to God (Psalm 30:4-5; 92:1; 97:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Psalm 100:1-5, a psalm of thanksgiving). Lack of an attitude of thanksgiving can lead to spiritual blindness and sin (Romans 1:20-21). It's always fitting for us to reflect on our obligation to give thanks.

Each fall in the United States the nation observes a thanksgiving holiday. Yet, how many are truly thankful? How many of us in this country or in this world acknowledge God as the source of our blessings and take the time to express genuine and heartfelt thanks to God for all he gives us?

We should thank God daily for his blessings. Nevertheless to set aside a special time to offer thanksgiving to God for our blessings is a sound Biblical principle. The Thanksgiving custom in the United States is often traced to the Puritan English pilgrims who were among the first in modern times to settle this land from across the ocean.

Actually, festivals of thanksgiving have a far more ancient history, and a number of thanksgiving feasts are recorded in the Bible. In the tabernacle and later the temple the daily sacrifices were accompanied by prayers of thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 23:30). Among the sacrifices were offerings especially designated as thanksgiving offerings (Leviticus 7:12). The annual festivals were given to

Israel as occasions of rejoicing and thanksgiving (Deuteronomy 16:9-16; note: the "freewill" offerings included festal offerings of thanksgiving).

David organized a thanksgiving feast for Israel on the occasion of bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. On the occasion everyone was provided with "a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins" (1 Chronicles 16:1-3). On this occasion he specifically appointed a group of Levites "to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel" (1 Chronicles 16:4).

In the psalm of thanksgiving David wrote for this occasion, we are admonished to give thanks to God (1 Chronicles 16:7-8, 34-36).

On a later occasion, after Israel had given a substantial offering for the building of the Temple, David led the people in a thanksgiving celebration (1 Chronicles 29:13-22).

When the foundation of the second temple had been laid the people joined together to celebrate with praise and thanksgiving to God (Ezra 3:10-11).

Likewise, a thanksgiving service was held at the time of the dedication of the Jerusalem wall in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 12:27, 31, 40, 43).

Few if any have been blessed as greatly as the United States of America in modern times. So it's certainly fitting and proper that we especially offer profuse thanksgiving to God. And this is especially true for those of us in the Church of God who have the added blessings of spiritual understanding and forgiveness of our sins.

Some have recognized our obligation to give thanks to God for the blessings he has given us who live in the United States of America.

In December 1620, 102 passengers disembarked from a ship called the Mayflower at Plymouth, Massachusetts. These sojourners from England were fleeing religious persecution and hoped to establish a "New Zion" in the land called America.

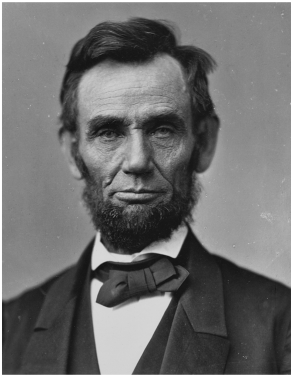
The winter that followed their landing was a severe one and by the next April about half of the settlers were dead. However, the following summer brought an abundant harvest and that fall the Governor of the Plymouth colony, William Bradford, decreed that a three day feast be held.

During the first summer a Patuxet Indian named Squanto had shown the newcomers how to gather seafood and cultivate corn, squash and beans. For three days that fall the colonists and about 90 of the friendly Wampanoag people, who had given food to the pilgrims in their time of need, feasted together in a spirit of rejoicing and, undoubtedly, thanksgiving, on wild turkey, venison, geese, duck, fish, cakes, nuts, cornbread and succotash, though there seems to be no reliable record of an official "thanksgiving proclamation," as such, on this occasion.

Years before the arrival of the pilgrims, however, thanksgiving services had occurred among settlers in Virginia. Noted is a thanksgiving service among the Jamestown, Virginia, settlers in 1610. The charter of the short lived Berkeley Hundred settlement in Virginia required that the anniversary of their day of arrival (December 4, 1619) be celebrated annually as a "day of thanksgiving to Almighty God." Even earlier Spanish and French colonists had observed thanksgiving celebrations in what later became Texas and Florida (cf. "Who Celebrated the

First Thanksgiving?," www.loc.gov/wiseguide/nov02/thanks-early.html).

During its existence, the Continental Congress issued thanksgiving proclamations annually over a period of several years. Presidents George Washington, John Adams, and James Madison issued thanksgiving proclamations. Over time local thanksgiving celebrations became common over most of the United States, and many states issued official proclamations of thanksgiving. However, a special day of thanksgiving did not become a permanent yearly American nationwide holiday until many years after the pilgrims' feast in 1621.



Abraham Lincoln's proclamation of 1863 set the precedent for America's national day of Thanksgiving

In fact, it was almost 250 years later, on October 3, 1863, that President Abraham Lincoln, during the midst of a bloody civil war, cited the national blessings of peace from foreign oppression, wealth of field, industry, commerce and mines, and the blessing of increasing population. President Lincoln, who was a student of the Bible but not so far as I

know a member of any Church, went on to say, "No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God..." He went on to declare, "It has seemed ... fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people." Lincoln then proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a national day of Thanksgiving and Praise to the beneficent Father who dwells in Heaven.

Today we live in a nation that has by and large forgotten that God is the Source of all blessings. As a physical nation we became the richest on earth, the wealthiest in all history! And although now through foolishness and greed we have become the world's greatest debtor nation, nevertheless even now we have more to be thankful for than perhaps any other people. Yet, as Paul prophesied, we have become a nation of people who are "lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy..." (2 Timothy 3:2).

While the physical nation at large may refuse to be genuinely thankful, however, we as individuals must remind ourselves from whence our blessings flow and how much we have to be thankful for, not only physically but spiritually. It is fitting at all times, that we should reflect on our blessings and their Source. God reminds us that "it is He who gives you the power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). And also, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

David wrote, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, The power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in the earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and

honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name" (1 Chronicles 29:11-13).

This prayer of Thanksgiving encompasses both physical and spiritual blessings. All of us in this nation share in its physical blessings. But all of us can also share in the spiritual blessings God has to offer if we are willing to genuinely seek him and yield to his will in our lives (1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 15:2; Psalm 119:2; Isaiah 55:6-7; Lamentations 3:25-26; Hebrews 11:6).

Millions in our world live aimlessly—searching for some meaning or purpose to life. We can know our purpose and destiny if we have spiritual eyes to see. Jesus Christ said, "I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25). We should give thanks also that God has given us access to such knowledge.

Today much of the world lives in chaos and fear. The word of God warns that if we continue to walk in the way of lawlessness and rebellion in the days and years to come the fears of our people will not lessen but multiply. God warns that the **very things we fear will come upon us** if we refuse to hear him (Isaiah 66:4; Ezekiel 11:8). Scripture warns of war, pestilence, famine, tribulation. But **we need not fear, if we are anchored in God** who is our Refuge and the Rock of our salvation (Psalm 46:1-2).

All too often we fail to give thanks even when we are blessed with abundance and things are going well. But we are admonished to go beyond giving thanks in such circumstances. We are instructed: "**In everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It may be counterintuitive to give thanks even in times of trial and adversity, but being thankful in a proper way can actually make such difficulties more bearable. Adam Clarke in his commentary on this verse remarks that we "should ever be in the spirit of prayer; and that ye should profit by every occurrence in life, and be continually grateful and obedient; for gratitude and obedience are inseparably connected."

When the apostles had been beaten and commanded not to proclaim the gospel, they rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41; cf. Acts 16:23-25). Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23). Paul wrote, "... we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

When suffering trials and tribulations of various kinds, we must learn to look beyond the present, to the ultimate rewards awaiting the faithful in God's kingdom. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

God promises to deliver from every trial and to set on high those who trust in

and obey Him (Exodus 19:5-6; Psalm 107:41-43; Psalm 91:1-16). Some of these promises will not be ultimately fulfilled until the resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-9; Romans 8:28, 35-39; Revelation 21:3-4). Yes, God has the power to deliver us even from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

The world seeks peace, but finds war, trouble, and destruction. But we can have access to the Source of Peace, who can teach us the way of peace. Paul wrote, "...to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). And the psalmist wrote, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165). These are just some of the things for which we may be thankful.

When President Lincoln made the proclamation establishing Thanksgiving he also asked the people in their prayers to "fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and union."

As we pause each day to give thanks and offer praise to God let's not forget, those of us who are citizens of the United States, that our nation is confused and divided and has lost its way, it's sick and in need of healing. In many ways it's in even greater need of restoration now than at Lincoln's time. And this is the condition of mankind in general in today's world.

God promises that one day, Jesus Christ is going to establish his kingdom on the earth, and with it universal peace and tranquility among all nations (Isaiah 2:1-4). Let us pray that God will bring these blessings to all of mankind, even the whole world, soon, as he has promised.

Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise Your glorious name. (1 Chronicles 29:10-13)

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:20-21)

I know that the Lord will maintain The cause of the afflicted, And justice for the poor. Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; The upright shall dwell in Your presence. (Psalms 140:12-13)

Find and Remain in the True Church (Part 1)

by Rod Reynolds

**"built on the
foundation of the
apostles and
prophets,
Jesus Christ himself
being the chief
cornerstone"**

Are you a member of the true Church? How many true Churches are there? What is the true Church? How can you know if you are in the true Church? And if you are in the true Church, how can you stay in the true Church of God? These are questions every person who desires to be a genuine Christian faces. We should know the answers. Not knowing the answers has already put the salvation of many in jeopardy, and can put your salvation in jeopardy.

A good deal of misinformation has been propagated concerning the matter of being in the Church and how it relates to our standing before God. Years ago, in the midst of an apostasy being engineered by the leaders of a Church of God fellowship, people were told that God called them into a particular corporate Church body, and that's where he expects them to stay. Individuals have said, "God called me into this Church," meaning a particular corporate organization, "and this is where I'm staying."

Is that what God called us into? Is that true?

Others have said, "Mr. X (you insert the name) is God's anointed, so whatever he says I'll follow. And to leave the Church [perceived as a human corporate organization] is rebellion against God's anointed." Is that true? Is a particular religious leader God's anointed? Is leaving the corporate Church led by such a leader rebellion against God's anointed? In the midst of wholesale doctrinal changes members of what had been purported to be "God's Church"

were told "God will never leave you nor forsake you," the implication being he will never leave you nor forsake you if you remain attached to a particular corporate Church organization. Is it true that God makes an unconditional promise never to leave nor forsake us if we simply remain attached to a particular corporate body?

Perhaps you've wrestled with the idea of "leaving the Church," and what that might mean. I want to deal with these questions and help you find the answers to them. And I want to discuss some general principles that will help you understand what it means to be in the true Church of God, and how you can identify the true Church, become a part of it, and remain in it. My purpose is not to attack anyone, nor any church organization, but to help you understand the truth about some rather urgent questions that possibly you, your family or some of your friends are dealing with or may in the future deal with in one way or another.

First, let's understand just what is a "church." In the New Testament two words frequently appear either of which could be understood as equivalent to the English word "church." One of those words is *ekklesia*, which literally means "called out from." It is usually translated "church" in the King James, although it's also occasionally translated "assembly." In New Testament usage it generally implies an assembly (general or local) of people called out of the world. The Church consists of those who have been called out of darkness into the light of God's truth, and who have responded to their calling in a positive way.

"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**" (I Peter 2:9). To the Church in Thessalonica it is written: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the **word of God** which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the **word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13). Paul and Barnabas, preaching to a crowd in a Jewish synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, said to them, "Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent" (Acts 13:26). Afterward, the word spread rapidly throughout the city. Then it says, "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the **word of God**. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the **word of God** should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:44-46).

Those who hear the word of God have the option of receiving it or rejecting it. Those who receive the word of God and respond to it can become a part of the true Church. See our article: "Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called In This Age," available on our website: cogmessenger.org.

The second word for "Church" in the Greek New Testament is *sunagoge*. It means literally those "brought together." It is usually simply transliterated into the anglicized form *synagogue* in the KJV, but it is also translated into "congregation," and "assembly." In the New Testament the word "synagogue" usually refers to a Jewish assembly, the Jewish equivalent of what we would call a "church." But it also is used in reference to Christian assemblies or churches (James 2:2, for

example). Some other words which you might want to consider in understanding what is the Church are: brethren, disciples, saints, the called, the elect, the chosen, the faithful, apostate, reprobate, false brethren, false apostles.

Essentially, a church is an assembly or body of people called or brought together. In the Bible, however, there is a distinction between the physical group of people that make up the visible or corporate Church, and the spiritual body which is the Church in an absolute sense. The Scriptures clearly reveal that within the visible, physical Church there are individuals who are not really converted. The Bible reveals that there can be division or schism within the visible Church. Although such division is expressly contrary to God's will, he, nevertheless, allows it.

The Scriptures also show that there is a false Church, a counterfeit, which is not God's Church at all but is of Satan. And there are false apostles, false ministers and false brethren, who claim to be Christian, and may appear to many to be Christian, but are not in God's eyes.

What is it we have been called into? In the baptism ceremony experienced by many of those who have responded to the true gospel in a positive way, it was stated that you were *not* being baptized into any denomination or sect of this world.

In a valid baptism one is baptized into Christ. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). A true Christian is one who has been baptized into Christ, and into his death. That means that we not only enter into a spiritual union with Christ, but we also die, in a symbolic sense. We are to be changed from what we were before, slaves to sin, and live for God. "... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6).

"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Romans 6:10-12).

So a true Christian is one who has been baptized not into some organization of men, but into Christ, and into his death, to become a new person, having been changed to a newness of life. "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Becoming a part of the true Church is a life transforming event. As one is baptized into Christ, into his death, that person is also baptized into the Church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (I Corinthians 12:13). The true Church is, in a sense, the body of Christ, as it is infused with Christ's Spirit. "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (I Corinthians 12:27). The Apostle Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

In a valid baptism one is baptized not in the name of any man but in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christ told those he sent out as apostles to preach the gospel: "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" (Matthew 28:19).

Peter wrote of the Church: "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*" (1 Peter 2:9). Light is a metaphor for the *truth* of God's word.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path" (Psalms 119:105). "The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple" (Psalms 119:130). "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (II Peter 1:19).

God calls you, not into a corporate body, not into an organization of men, but "into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). According to Scripture, then, this is what we are called into: the truth, and fellowship with Jesus Christ, who is the personification of truth. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

We are called to be a part of the true Church. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24). The true spiritual Church of God consists of the "general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are registered in heaven*" (Hebrews 12:23). "Here we have no continuing city," but "our citizenship is in heaven" (Hebrews 13:14; Philippians 3:20). The true Church of God are those registered in heaven, that is whose names God has written in the "*Book of Life.*" It is they, if their names remain written in the *Book of Life*, to whom the promise of eternal life pertains. When God's presence is with men in the New Jerusalem, we are told: "... there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27).

Yet, not all who are of the visible Church are of the true Spiritual body of Christ. Israel at Mt. Sinai, though called out of Egypt, had many faithless people who remained in their sins. Israel serves as an example for us. We are warned that we, within the Church, will fall into the same errors as ancient Israel if we fail to diligently pursue the true faith.

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now **these things became our examples**, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to

eat and drink, and rose up to play.' Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed **lest he fall**" (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end**, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12-19). Continuing, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

In such circumstances, the name of one who has been baptized can be removed from the *Book of Life*. In warning his Church to hold fast to the truth and repent, Jesus says, "**He who overcomes** shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not **blot out his name from the Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (Revelation 3:5). Clearly the admonition implies that if we don't heed Christ's warning, our names can be removed from the Book of Life. We're also warned: "...if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall **take away his part from the Book of Life...**" (Revelation 22:19).

Paul included in a list of perils he faced in his ministry, those "among **false brethren**" (2 Corinthians 11:26). We see in the prophecy of Revelation concerning the Church references to false apostles, false teachers, people who claim falsely to be (spiritual) Jews, but are of the "synagogue [church] of Satan," etc. Jesus says to the Church of Ephesus, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who **say they are apostles and are not**, and have found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

And to Smyrna, Jesus said, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a **synagogue [church] of Satan**" (Revelation 2:9). He's speaking to the Church of God. The reference to those who falsely say they are Jews is speaking of Jew's in a spiritual sense, not of the flesh. In other words those who claim to be spiritual Jews, converted people, but are not. "... he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:29).

To Pergamos Jesus said, "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and

to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:14-16). And to Thyatira Jesus said, "... I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. **And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end,** to him I will give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:20-26).

We are *not* commanded in Scripture to abide in any particular corporate body, nor any other organization of men. But we *are* told to abide in Christ. "**Abide in Me,** and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:4-6). For us to abide in Christ, *his words* must abide in us. "**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,** you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). We are to abide in his love, which requires *keeping his commandments*. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. **If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,** just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9-10). "Now **he who keeps His commandments abides in Him,** and He in him" (1 John 3:24). Scripture teaches, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Despite clever arguments to the contrary, the Sabbath, the Holy Days, tithing and other laws rejected by most "Christian" churches are among the commandments of God and of Christ. Jesus taught and set an example of keeping these commandments. The apostles, and, for the most part, as history shows, their immediate successors, continued in the commandments. Yet, vast numbers of people who believe themselves to be Christians walk according to human devised Church traditions, **traditions which have supplanted God's commandments in matters** of religious observance. Jesus Christ's and the apostles' clear teachings and example are often ignored, in favor of "tradition." But Scripture teaches, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Many, even many who once understood clearly the importance of walking according to God's commandments after the example of Christ and the apostles and the plain teaching of God's word, have been confused or deluded by false assertions regarding the new covenant, and derogatory epithets such as

"legalists." Where do you find in the Bible God punishing anyone for *obeying his commandments*?

You will find plenty of warnings and examples of punishment, on the other hand, for *disobedience* to the commandments. Note how the Church of God is described or defined in Scripture. "And the dragon was enraged with the woman [symbolic language here for God's Church], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, **who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ**" (Revelation 12:17). "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who **keep the commandments of God** and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

In the *New Testament* we are told: "**Blessed are those who do His commandments**, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). You lightly *assume* at the peril of your eternal life that the commandments referred to do not include the Sabbath and others widely rejected. It can be definitively proven that such commandments are binding under the New Covenant. Christ hates lawlessness, as is stated in Hebrews 1:9. The Greek for "lawlessness" there is Greek: *anomia*, without law, implying contempt for and rejection of God's law. Christ, as we read in Revelation 2, hates the deeds and doctrines of Nicolaitans, a symbolic term for haters of God's law who by their teachings lead members of God's Church into committing idolatry and spiritual fornication (Revelation 2:6, 14-15). It is those who *overcome* such deceptions who are promised eternal life. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11).

Christ's Church consists of those who *have fellowship with Christ*, into which we were called. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). To have fellowship with Christ requires walking in the light, a metaphor for truth, as opposed to walking in darkness. "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:5-6). The Sabbath, the Holy Days, are just the more obvious doctrines of the Bible that have been rejected or adulterated by leaders who have turned from truth. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Those who reject the truth, or who no longer believe the truth, regardless of position, are unbelievers. We are told, "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?...What part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). We cannot enter or remain in those fellowships whose leaders reject the truths of God's word and teach doctrines contrary to God's word.

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Scripture asks (Amos 3:3). Jesus said, "Every...house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

We are admonished many times in Scripture to be unified not merely in some superficial manner, but to be of one mind. Such unity cannot be accomplished by being forced through intimidation or coercion. Before we can hope to be of one mind with one another in the way God intends, we must first individually become

of **one mind with Jesus Christ**. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Under the New Covenant, as we yield to him, Christ engraves his very law, which expresses his mind and nature, in our minds. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (Hebrews 10:16). As we learn to truly live by God's ten commandments, as expanded and magnified by his word and Christ's example, and grow in having his mind developed in us, we can become more like-minded with one another.

Paul wrote, "And I call upon you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the same thing **ye may** all say, and there **may not be** divisions among you, and **ye may** be perfected in the same mind, and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10, Young's Literal Translation). As the YLT makes clear, Paul wrote in the subjunctive mood, the mood of contingency, in urging unity of mind among the brethren. Because of carnality of mind among them, the Corinthian church lacked unity. Paul recognized that some truly converted people are more spiritually mature than others, and that *perfect* unity of mind is a *goal* towards which we should be striving. Even so, while making allowances for individual differences and levels of maturity, the converted ought to maintain at minimum a unity of mind in things of major importance. "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.... **To the degree that we have already attained**, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind" (Philippians 3:15-16).

One of the primary reasons Jesus Christ established a ministry to serve the Church is to develop and strengthen the bonds of unity through example and sound doctrine. "And he gave some [to be] apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the **unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God**, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13, ASV). Notice that unity is to be centered on faith—our *beliefs*, our *system of belief*—and on the *knowledge* (Greek: *epignosis*, **precise and correct knowledge**) of the Son of God. These are matters of the mind. They relate directly to *doctrine* as well as *how one lives*. Paul exhorted Timothy, "...be an *example* to the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." And further, "Take heed to yourself and **to the doctrine**. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:12, 16). A ministry faithfully practicing and teaching sound biblical doctrine is a key to the development of the unity of mind God wills for his Church.

Yet we are often warned that there would be *in our midst* those of another mind, who would lead many into paths of destruction. "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their

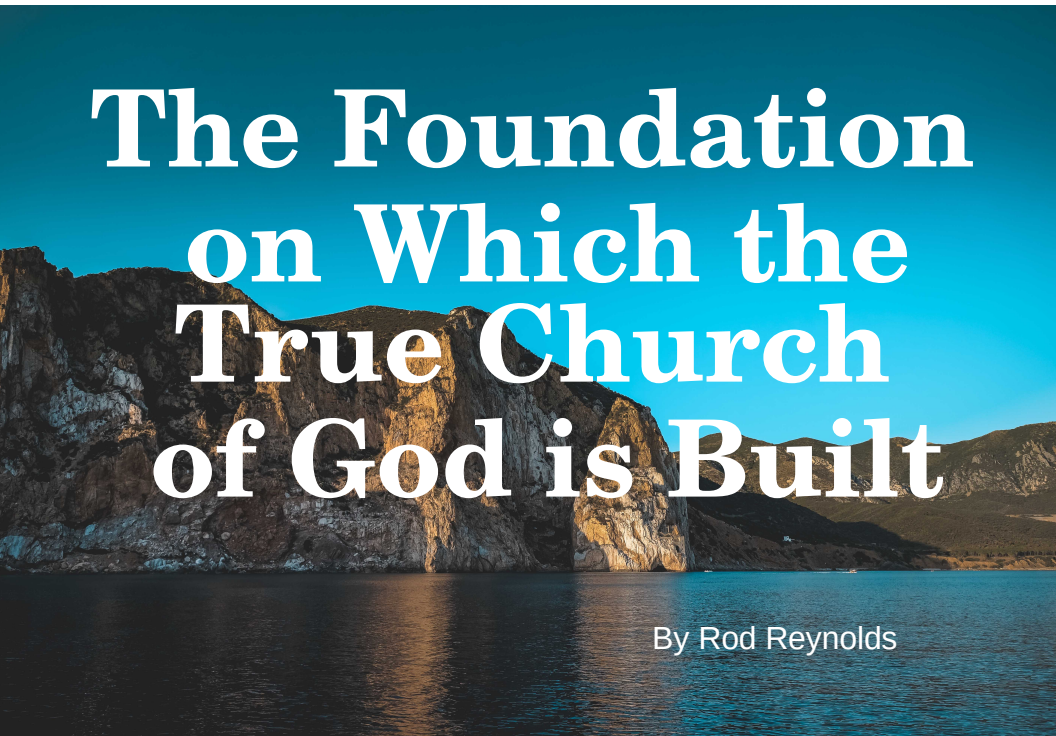
destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (II Peter 2:1-2). The natural, fleshly mind, the carnal mind with which we were all born, "...is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Even as it was in the New Testament Church, within any Church body there can be those, even in the ministry, who allow their carnal minds to prevail over God's Spirit. They are or become "men of **corrupt minds and destitute of the truth**.... From such withdraw yourself" (1 Timothy 6:5). These false teachers cause the way of truth to be blasphemed (2 Peter 2:2). They are "... certain men [who] have secretly slipped in among you... ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil..." (Jude 1:4, New English Translation). These are "mockers" walking "according to their own ungodly lusts...sensual [or worldly] persons, who cause divisions..." (Jude 1:18-19). Yes, such men, teaching falsehoods, teaching lawlessness contrary to true doctrine, *cause division*, and we are to *withdraw from them!*

Many times in the history of the Church, division has occurred as a result of heretical teachings being introduced. People have had to choose to obey the truth or take the easy, expedient course of conforming to the wishes of those in charge (humanly). This occurred at the end of the apostolic age, as new leaders began to compromise with the world. Most, as is usually the case, chose to abandon truth and go the way of compromise. It's occurred many other times before and since. During the human lifetime of Christ, "even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43). Many allowed the church leaders of their day, this Scripture tells us, to intimidate them into inaction concerning their convictions. They chose remaining in fellowship with the church (synagogue is a synonym for church), over having fellowship with Christ. Jesus told his followers, "They will put you out of the synagogues [churches]" (John 16:2). This tells us that there would be times when unfaithful men would assume control even of what had been churches of God—and would put Christ's own disciples out of the assemblies. This was already happening before the close of the first century. "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us" (III John 1:9). Diotrephes sought to supplant John the Apostle, who had testified of the truth.

Our salvation is not in men, nor an institution, but in faith towards God. "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22). "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). Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [besides Jesus Christ] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We must not allow misguided loyalty to any man, nor any organization of men, to lead us into compromising God's truth and hence rejecting him. Having the Eternal as our God and being his people implies our *continuing faithfulness* in accepting and obeying his commandments. This is as true today as it was when Moses said to the Israelites as they were about to enter the promised land: "Today you have

proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His *special people*, just as He has promised you, **that you should keep all His commandments**, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and **that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God**, just as He has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:17-19).

Wherever an assembly of God's true Church is, it will be walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments.



The Foundation on Which the True Church of God is Built

By Rod Reynolds

Jesus said to Peter: "And I also say to you that you are Peter [*petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

This verse does **not** imply what some have assumed, that **human authority**, beginning with Peter, is at the foundation of the Church.

Peter's name, Greek *petros*, means "a detached stone or boulder," or "a stone that might be thrown or easily moved," as opposed to *petra*, (Christ referring to himself), meaning "a mass of rock," or "foundation" stone, or "rocky fortress" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words; Greek-English Lexicon*, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich). **The Church is built preeminently on Christ, not Peter's nor any other human authority** (1 Peter 2:6-8; Ephesians

2:20-22).

Jesus, before his departure into heaven after his resurrection, authorized his apostles (all of them) and their helpers and successors **to teach those things he had commanded them, not doctrines supplanting the the things he had taught**. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, '**All authority has been given to Me [Jesus Christ himself]** in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...**'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

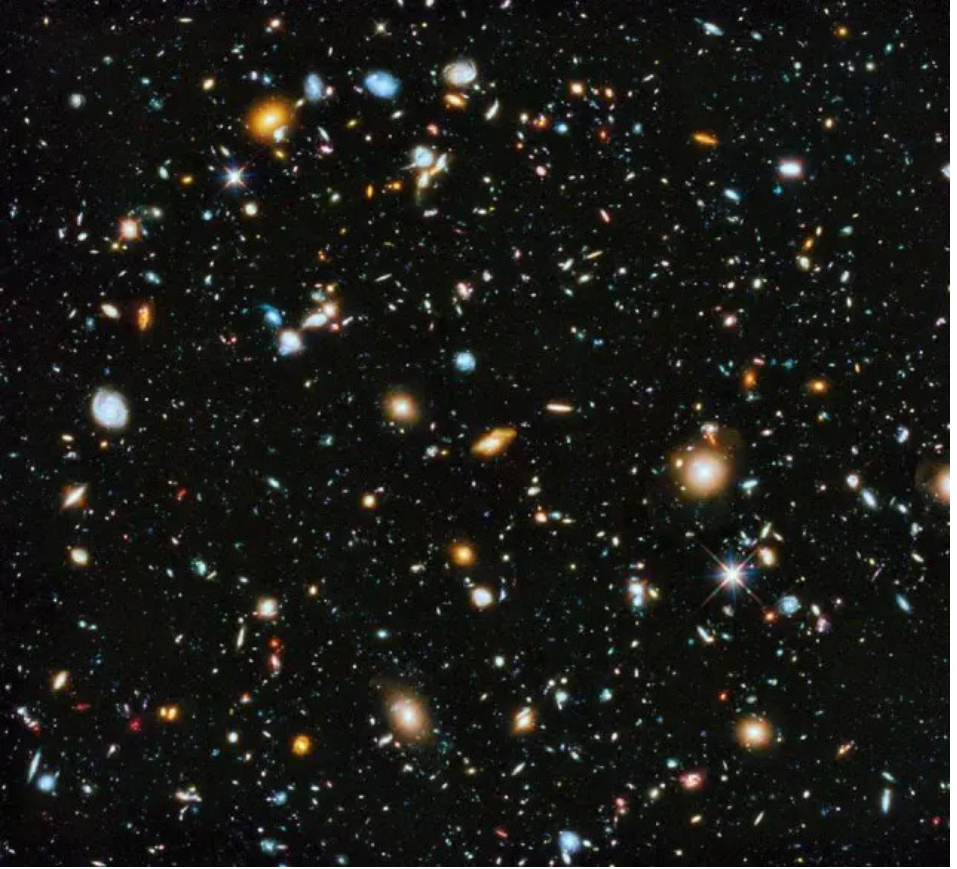
"Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion **A chief cornerstone** [Jesus Christ], elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.' Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.' They stumble, **being disobedient to the word [the word of God]**, to which they also were appointed" (I Peter 2:6-8).

"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone**, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:17-22).

Paul, appointed an apostle by Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15-16; 1 Timothy 1:1), brought the gospel to the Greek city of Corinth, and in doing so laid the foundation for the Church he established there. What did he say was the foundation of that Church? "For no other **foundation** can anyone lay than that which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ**" (I Corinthians 3:11). This was written as a warning to both the teachers in the Church and those being taught not to propagate nor give heed to false teachings.

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, '**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed**'" (John 8:31). "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and **hears My sayings and does them**, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and **laid the foundation on the rock**. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock" (Luke 6:46-48).

Those who claim authority to teach but do not abide in the doctrine, the teachings, of Jesus Christ, as found in the inspired Scriptures of the Bible, are false teachers, of whom we are warned about (Matthew 24:5, 11; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Hebrews 13:8-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20). "**Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son**" (II John 1:9).



Various long-exposure campaigns, like the Hubble eXtreme Deep Field (XDF) shown here, have revealed thousands of galaxies in a volume of the Universe that represents a fraction of a millionth of the sky. But even with all the power of Hubble, and all the magnification of gravitational lensing, there are still galaxies out there beyond what we are capable of seeing. (Credit: NASA/ESA/H. Teplitz and M. Rafelski (IPAC/Caltech), A. Koekemoer (STScI), R. Windhorst (ASU), and Z. Levay (STScI) (Bigthink.com).

What Will You Inherit?

by Rod Reynolds

There are a variety of ideas about the inheritance promised the children of God. Do they “go to heaven”? Is it other planets in the universe? It’s been speculated that each child of God will receive a planet of his own to rule. Or, is it the earth, as some have believed?

So, exactly what is the inheritance God has in store for his children? Is it the earth? Is it a planet for each child? Is it the universe? Is it “heaven”?

Even more importantly, what does it take to have a part in the inheritance God has in store for his children? What is God looking for? What does he want out of us—you or me—that will assure us a part in his inheritance, whatever it is?

The first question first. What is the inheritance God has in store for his children?

This is really quite an important question. And God wants us to know the answer. Notice what Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus:

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe**, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put **all things under His feet**, and gave Him to be **head over all things** to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:15-23).

The most common idea among various sects relating to the inheritance of those who profess Christ is that when one dies, he doesn't really die, but as an “immortal soul” goes to heaven, if having made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as savior before death. Some, such as Roman Catholics, practice infant baptism, believing that the mere act of “baptizing” an infant is a guarantee of “going to heaven.” However, the Bible nowhere teaches that fleshly human beings have or are “immortal souls.” Rather, it's taught that of all human beings who have lived and died, only Jesus Christ has “immortality” at the present time (1 Timothy 6:16). Others will not become immortal before the “first resurrection” at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish his kingdom (Romans 1:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:15-18; 20:4-6; for more on the subject of immortality and the “soul,” see also our articles “The Truth About Hell,” “Lazarus and the Rich Man,” and “What is Death?” available at cogmessenger.org, or you may write to us for a printed copy of any or each if you do not have access to them on the Internet).

As far as heaven is concerned, nowhere does the Bible state or indicate that humans “go to heaven” (the third heaven, where God dwells) upon dying. The Bible does speak of the reward or inheritance of the faithful being “reserved” in heaven (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 1:4). But the reward will not be received until Jesus Christ returns to the earth at the time of the “first resurrection” (Matthew 16:27; 25:31-34; Luke 14:14; Revelation 11:18; 20:4-6; 22:12). He will, when he returns, have the “reward with him,” which will be distributed at that time (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11; Matthew 25:31-34; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:8).

Jesus said, “No one [no human being] has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven...” (John 3:13; cf. Genesis 24:3, 7; Deuteronomy 4:39; Nehemiah 9:13; Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20; 4:10; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:14; 8:1). Scripture speaks of David being raised up and ruling once again over the people of Israel (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24). This will be following the return of Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God on the earth. David though counted faithful, did not ascend into heaven (Acts 2:34). David died and was buried, and his tomb remained even at the time of Christ’s earthly sojourn, the point being that he had not been resurrected, and is not now living (Acts 2:29). None of the faithful of old have as yet received the promise, “...that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:39-40). At the time of Christ’s coming again to dwell on the earth, shall occur the “first resurrection,” “a better resurrection,” consisting of those who proved faithful to God in this age, prior to that time (1 Corinthians 15:21-23; cf. Hebrews 11:35). Those resurrected at that time “shall be caught up ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,” as he descends from heaven to the earth, to the place from which he ascended to heaven after his resurrection (I Thessalonians 4:16-17; cf. Acts 1:11; Zechariah 14:4). So obviously they will not have already been in heaven with Christ, else they would not be caught up to **meet him** in the air, where the clouds are, the earth’s atmosphere.

Others, citing Psalms 8:6, where it’s stated of mankind that God had put “all things under his feet,” suggest that the earth only is to be the inheritance of the faithful.

Yet, the Psalm in question says of God, “Your glory is above the heavens” (Psalms 8:1). It speaks of “Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained” (Psalms 8:3).

It says of man, “You have made him a little lower than the angels” (Psalms 8:5). It says, “You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Psalms 8:6).

True, it is speaking of the earth, and the things on the earth. God gave humans dominion over the earth when he created them (Genesis 1:28). But is that all God intends for humans to have dominion over when his plan for mankind is consummated? When the Scripture says, “You have put all things under his feet,” does that mean exclusively the earth and nothing else is to be placed under mankind’s dominion?

The expression “works of your hands” is not to be taken literally, but is an expression of the fact that God is Creator—as one might make something with his hands. In that sense all creation is included in the expression “works of your hands” when applied to God (Psalm 102:25).

The one through whom God created all things is Jesus Christ. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:3, cf. John 1:1-3, 14-18). Jesus Christ is the “Word” spoken of by John in John 1:1 and the following context. He was, before his human birth and sojourn, a Divine being, the second member of the Godhead. But, as John wrote: “And the Word [who was God, John 1:1] became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth” (John

1:14).

Paul further explains that though Jesus Christ was God, the “Logos,” or “Spokesman” for the Godhead, the very being who led Israel through the wilderness and spoke to them the ten commandments (1 Corinthians 10:1-4), he, “... **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7, Green’s Literal Translation). Having become a human being subject to death, having lived life in the flesh without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22), Jesus was crucified to pay the penalty for our sins, that we might be redeemed from that penalty, which is death (Romans 6:23), through his sacrifice (Matthew 20:28; 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2:21-25; 1 John 2:1-2).

Thus now Jesus Christ is a human being, a man who has been resurrected to immortality as a Son of God, the firstborn from the dead. In him dwells all the fullness of God, and through him all things in heaven and earth are to be reconciled to God. As both Creator and Savior, he is **preeminent over “all things” whether in heaven or earth** (Colossians 1:18, cf. verses 16-20). **“All things” are placed under his feet** (1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22). So we see that **“all things” is not limited to the earth only.**

The Greek expression translated “all things” (Colossians 1:16) is τα παντα (*ta panta*, lexical form πᾶς), meaning in this context **“the all,”** including, “the **universe...** a well-known philosophical phrase” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; cf. Romans 11:36).

In Hebrews 2 Paul explains that the words in Psalm 8 do not apply to this age only, but also it is prophetic of “the world to come” (Hebrews 2:5). In quoting Psalm 8, Paul explains, “‘You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in that He put all in subjection under him, **He left nothing that is not put under him.** But now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8). Yet, Jesus Christ has been “appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:2). And as we’ve seen, “all things” is not limited to the earth and things on the earth.

In an apparent reference to Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:6, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 explains that all authority will be made subject to the Son, except that of the Father, “that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:24-27). Those resurrected to eternal life will “bear the image of the heavenly Man,” that is, the image (or spiritual nature) of Jesus Christ, as physical human beings bear the “image,” or likeness (or fleshly nature), of the fleshly man, Adam (1 Corinthians 15:42-46, 49). Flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God, but only those resurrected in Christ’s likeness (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:50; 1 John 3:2). They will have glorified, Spirit bodies, like that of the resurrected Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:44; Philippians 3:21).

Those in the first resurrection are promised a share in the inheritance God has given to Jesus Christ, which, as we’ve seen, includes all things. Indeed all persons granted a place in God’s kingdom as his sons, whether in the first resurrection or later, will share in that heritage. They will be heirs not in the sense of receiving title to the property or position of one who has died, for God is immortal, and will never die. The children of God in his Kingdom are heirs in that God will share with them both the Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and all that he possesses. That inheritance includes the gift of eternal life, God life (John 3:16;

Titus 3:7). Having been “glorified” in the likeness of Christ, the children of God will be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth in glorious power he will establish his government over the entire world (Revelation 11:15). Those who have been converted and remained faithful in this age, overcoming with the help of God’s Holy Spirit the temptations of the flesh and Satan’s world, will be given places of responsibility in serving under Christ in his world ruling government for a period of a thousand years (Daniel 7:27; Revelation 3:21; 20:6). Jesus Christ and the saints will rule in righteousness and justice, the world will be at peace, the earth will be restored to a pristine condition of beauty and productivity (Isaiah 9:7; 32:1; 35:1-2; Ezekiel 36:35).

After that period, Satan will be released for a short time from the prison in which he shall have been bound for a thousand years. As a final test for the physical human beings alive on the earth at that time Satan will be allowed to deceive those who are willing to follow his deceptions. They will be rallied by Satan in a final attempt to overthrow Jesus Christ, but the attempt will end in failure and destruction for those so deceived (Revelation 20:7-9). Satan, the “devil,” the archangel who became the arch enemy of God and of mankind, will once again be tossed into the lake of fire, where the “beast” and “false prophet” had been cast previously, and he and his angels will be confined there (Revelation 20:10, cf. Genesis 3:1-5; Ezekiel 28:13-15; Matthew 25:41). Hebrew and Greek terms used of Satan (Revelation 9:11) mean in effect “destroyer.” Satan’s ways are evil, and end in destruction and death for human beings.

After that will come a “second resurrection,” or general resurrection where the dead from past ages will be resurrected to physical life, and given the opportunity to be taught of God, and repent, as they will be tested and judged by the works they do after they are instructed in God’s ways (Revelation 20:11-13). Those who refuse to repent will be cast into the lake of fire and be burned up, dying a “second death” (Revelation 20:14-15, cf. Matthew 3:12; Malachi 4:3). For answers to questions you may have related to these events you may consult our articles “The Truth About Hell,” “What Is Death?,” “Lazarus and the Rich Man,” and “Three Resurrections,” all freely available at cogmessenger.org.

Following the events described above, the earth will be purged by fire, and renewed, to such an extent that it is referred to as a “new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). It will be the same globe, the same planet, but completely renewed, and the earth in relation to the other planets, etc., or at least the earth’s atmosphere, will evidently be reordered in some manner.

Then God the Father will descend from the third heaven with his throne, and will dwell with men. At that time God’s plan for mankind will have been accomplished, and Christ will deliver up the kingdom to him (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). The word translated “end” in verse 24 is τέλος (*telos*), which means the conclusion, the aim, the purpose, or goal.

The throne of God will be on the earth in the new Jerusalem, and they (God and his “servants,” the entire Divine family) shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:3-5). What will they be reigning over? The earth only? Whatever it is, the saints, as we’ve seen, will be sharing in that government, that heritage, that inheritance. Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me **in heaven and on**

earth" (Matthew 28:18). **God created the universe as a place to dwell in** (Isaiah 40:22). While his throne will be on the earth, **his dominion is the entire universe**. It was created to be ruled over, and, evidently, to be inhabited. In any case, **those who overcome will be made sons in God's eternal kingdom, and they will inherit "all things," that means everything, the entire universe** (Revelation 21:7)!

God doesn't give us the details of how all this will be worked out. God's word does not say each of his sons will be given his own planet. But God's word clearly teaches that God's family will rule the entire universe, and each of his sons will have a part in that inheritance.

So, just for the sake of argument, what if God did give you a whole planet, or maybe a whole galaxy, or even billions of galaxies, and told you to administer that portion of his domain? Would you be able to handle the job?

What is it that God is looking for? Is he looking for people who are really talented and successful? People who've proven they can handle big jobs, manage businesses, or rule nations? Are those the kind of people God is looking for?

For the most part, God has **not** chosen the wise, the powerful, the privileged of this age. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (I Corinthians 1:26-31). Note that in verse twenty-six, there are no Greek words for "are called" at the end of the verse. As Jesus said, **God has called many, but few are chosen** (Matthew 22:14). The ellipsis, if one is supplied, at the end verse 26 should be "are chosen," not are called. Because while many people of all walks of life, including many rich and powerful, have been called, very few of the latter have been chosen in this age (see our article "Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called in this Age?" available at cogmessenger.org).

The World English Bible Translation renders the verses 26 and 27 of the passage as follows: "For you see your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble; but God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong" (I Corinthians 1:26-27). The Greek word translated "chose" (or in the NKJV "has chosen") in verse 27, ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*), is in the aorist tense, and is better translated "chooses" (as in the Concordant version).

Of those chosen, very few indeed have been people of influence, leaders of industry, of government, or any other human endeavor. Why? Because people of wealth and influence, so-called "successful" people, are seldom willing to give up their status or wealth or influence to serve God.

A good example is that the rich young man recorded by Matthew (Matthew

19:16-26). Note the difficulty of one who is rich in this world to enter God's kingdom. Going on, we see, however, that those who are unreserved and unwavering in their commitment to God, who are willing to forsake anything and everything to follow Christ, will be rewarded with an inheritance in God's kingdom (Matthew 19:27-30).

James points out also that God typically chooses not the rich in material wealth, but those relatively poor of the world in material terms, yet rich in godly faith, to be heirs in his kingdom (James 2:5-12). Notice, though, as James points out, we are to practice the precepts we are taught from God's law, knowing that it is by that law that we are being judged.

Some examples of people we might expect to see in God's kingdom in the first resurrection would include Anna, a prophetess, whose distinction was that she spent a great deal of time in fasting and prayer (Luke 2:36-38).

The poor widow, who gave all she had as an offering to God (Luke 21:1-4). The word "mite" is translated from the Greek *lepton*, the very smallest in value of coins. (Note that it was in fact *money* that she gave to God through her donation to the Temple treasury).

The story of Lazarus and the rich man is a parable, given as a lesson to warn against covetousness. Was this Lazarus a real person? Perhaps not, but there have no doubt been many like him. In his case, he was a sick, diseased beggar, who died in poverty, yet found worthy of God's kingdom (Luke 16:19-21, 25).

There's no indication that any of these would be considered "successful," or of much significance in this world. Certainly it's doubtful that running a business would be on the resume of any one of them. These examples tell us that it's not one's station or status in this world that counts, but one's devotion to God. One's willingness to submit to God, to be guided by his law, to be devoted without reservation to his will.

Did God choose Israel because Israel was the greatest of nations? They were the "least of all peoples." Israel was not chosen because of their greatness or wisdom, but were chosen because of the faithfulness of their forefathers, and the promises God had made to them concerning their descendants (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Genesis 26:4-5). The Israelites were warned to love God, and keep his commandments to remain in his favor (Deuteronomy 7:9-12; cf. Exodus 19:5-6). God told Israel that their wisdom before the nations would be—not their own genius—but his laws which he had given them (Deuteronomy 4:1-6).

Moses was chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses was highly educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, we're told (Acts 7:22). Is that why God chose him? Wisdom and learning are not necessarily bad, of themselves. Indeed, we are admonished to seek wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:5-7). But worldly wisdom does not qualify anyone for an inheritance in God's kingdom. What else does the Bible tell us about Moses? It tells us that he was faithful (Hebrews 3:5). It tells us that he was willing to forsake his status in Egypt as a member of the royal family in order to serve God (Hebrews 11:24-27). It tells us that of all men on earth there was none more humble than Moses (Numbers 12:3).

When God appointed Moses to the task of leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses saw himself as utterly unfit for the job. And humanly speaking,

despite his education, despite his former status in Egypt, or any other human qualification, he was unfit. Do you think Moses, by his own talents and skills alone, would have been able to free the Israelites and lead them out of slavery in Egypt? (Exodus 3:10-11). God assured Moses that it would be through God's power, not his, that he would be able to accomplish the task assigned to him (Exodus 4:1-9). Moses still protested, with his own weaknesses and inadequacies in view (Exodus 4:10). But God told him to go as he had been told to do the task assigned, and God would supply the wisdom and abilities needed to get the job done (Exodus 4:11-15).

Why did God appoint David to be king over Israel? Was it because David was thought of as a great ruler by the people around him? He was so lightly esteemed that he was not even invited to be present when Samuel the prophet came to visit his father's household (1 Samuel 16:1-7, 11-12). When David confronted Goliath, the giant Philistine warrior, he did not depend on his own strength and prowess alone to gain the victory, but he looked to God (1 Samuel 17:37). In his psalms, David repeatedly praises God, as the source of his strength and success (2 Samuel 22:1-4; 21-36).

God can give us the wisdom we need to handle whatever responsibility he gives us.

Did God give Solomon the throne of Israel because he had a reputation for great wisdom and ability? He viewed himself as a "little child," not knowing "how to go out or come in." But he asked God for understanding, and God granted his request (1 Kings 3:3-14).

God wants us to be learning genuine humility, to humble ourselves before him and yield to his word (Isaiah 66:2). Genuine godly humility, what the Bible calls the "fear of God," is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). If one is genuinely meek and humble before God, he will guide that person in judgment (Psalm 25:9).

At the same time, God wants us to be seeking wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-13; Proverbs 4:5-8; 1 Corinthians 14:20). If we genuinely seek godly wisdom, and strive after it, we will not be denied (James 1:5-8). Note that we can't be double-minded if we are to have godly wisdom. We must be committed, genuine and firm in faith. There is no task too difficult for God (Jeremiah 32:17). And with godly faith, nothing will be impossible for us either (Matthew 17:20).

Yes, we do have a lot to learn, and we need to be busy learning to know God better. As we grow in godly wisdom, understanding his will, how to apply his laws in our lives and circumstances, we will grow in our capacity to be successful in our endeavors, in our family life, in whatever we pursue in life, as long as it's according to God's will. And God will be there with us, to empower us.

But whatever our status in this life, no matter how weak or limited we are, we will not be resurrected with the limitations of the human flesh. At the time of death, the body of one who is faithful is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:42-43; cf. Revelation 1:13-16; Philippians 3:20-21; Daniel 12:2-3). We know now in part, but then we will know as we are known, because we will be like God, as sons in his divine family (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2-3).

What God wants to know is, will we submit to his rule? Will we obey his commandments, his word? God knows we are weak and limited. But he also knows if we are faithful in little, we will be faithful in much (Luke 16:10; 19:16-17).

What are you doing with what God has given you? Are you growing in faith, in love, in obedience to God and service toward him? These are the things we are being judged by, and we will be rewarded according to our works (Romans 2:6-9).

So what should we be doing? Learning to manage a business? That would doubtless be a good idea if that is your occupation. But what God really wants of all of us is to learn to manage ourselves (Proverbs 25:28). We must learn to put God's law, his word, to work in our lives—that means in our families, in our relationships with other people outside our families, in our relationship with God.

In all these things we should be striving to overcome our flesh, and the influence of the world and of Satan, because it's those who overcome who are promised a place in God's kingdom as his sons, and who will be heirs of all things (Revelation 21:7).

Behold the Lord! The Lord is coming with strength, and His arm is with power; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. (Isaiah 40:10; Apostles Bible version)

And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. (Revelation 22:12)

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)

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

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

"For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:2)

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (II Peter 1:2-4)



How **BIG** is the Universe?

by Rod Reynolds

On some clear night, get away from the lights and look up into the sky. You'll see a sight that has stirred excitement and wonder in the minds of men for thousands of years. Spread before your eyes will be a universe of space studded with sparkling diamonds of light. Maybe you've wondered, how many stars are there? Just how big is the universe?

Men have asked these questions for a long time. For astronomers and others interested in the universe, "How big is it?" continues to be a basic question. Over the thousands of years of history, mankind has come up with several different answers.

In early history, down to sometime after 1000 B.C., evidence indicates that specialists in various nations possessed a considerable knowledge of astronomy and the related science of geodesy, the science which deals with the size, shape and mapping of the earth's surface. It's believed that the complex scientific knowledge was known only to those specially trained and educated. Their

knowledge was preserved in libraries and monuments. But over the centuries the libraries were destroyed and the symbolism hidden in the monuments was forgotten.

One of a number of such monuments, the "Great Pyramid of Cheops" on the Giza plateau in Egypt, was, according to ancient texts, intended as a repository of ancient knowledge related to geodesy. It was, according to the sources, a geographical rendition of the northern hemisphere. Careful analysis of the pyramid has confirmed this, and that it also served as an almanac to accurately measure the passage of time by measuring the motions of heavenly bodies, and incorporated additional sophisticated technical, scientific and mathematical knowledge. Far from believing the earth is flat, they knew it was spherical and measured its circumference with a high degree of precision. Peter Tompkins and Livio Stecchini provide convincing evidence and details in their book, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, Harper and Row, 1971.

Alongside the refined technical knowledge of those ancient ages were the popular myths and allegories of pagan religion. These hid in symbolic form some elements of truth, but their overall impact was to foster false superstitions about the nature of the world and the universe. In Egypt, for example, some educated in



The first publicly released science-quality image from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, revealed on July 11, 2022, is the deepest infrared view of the universe to date. (Image credit: NASA, ESA, CSA, and STScI) (Space.com)

the sciences certainly knew the true relation of the earth to the sun and the stars. Yet, the popular religion taught that the stars were fixed on the body of the goddess Nut, and that the sun glided over her body in a boat each day. Thus for the average Egyptian, the scale of the universe was reduced to the human like body of a pagan goddess.

By the time of the Hellenistic Age (about 300 B.C.) the ancient science had been almost completely strangled by superstitions and unsound philosophical speculations. During the Hellenistic Age almost everybody believed in astrology, the idea that the stars somehow control a person's fate. A common belief among the Greeks at the time was that a new star appeared each time a person was born, and one went out each time somebody died.

About 150 B.C. a Greek named Hipparchus, with the aid of ancient documents as well as his own observations, compiled a star atlas of about 1000 stars. In the second century A.D. the Greek-Egyptian astronomer Ptolemy devised a general scheme of the universe. Following ideas of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, Ptolemy's system envisioned a series of spheres with the spherical earth at their center. Situated in the transparent spheres were the sun, moon and planets. All of the "fixed stars" were contained in the eighth sphere. Ptolemy counted 1022 stars, and stated that the number for the whole universe could not be over 3000.

During the early Middle Ages the world of Christendom entered what has been called a "Dark Age." Scriptures were grossly twisted and improperly used to support ridiculously false concepts of the world and the universe. A popular idea of the time was that the universe was shaped like the Tabernacle built by Moses in the wilderness. The stars were supposedly pushed about by angels over a flat earth.

The Arabs, meanwhile, preserved Ptolemy's ideas until they were adopted again in the West about the 13th century A.D. Only faint echos of ancient knowledge persisted. Isidorus Hispalensis, Bishop of Seville, was unusually well educated for his day. He remarked in seventh century A.D. writings that ancient geographers had written of peoples living on continents across the Atlantic, one north and one south of the equator. A world map will show you that these continents are what we call North and South America. But his remarks passed unnoticed. In Europe knowledge had so decayed that even the existence of India and China was for a time virtually forgotten, though there had been direct contact with Rome as late as the first century B.C.

Hundreds of years before, however, the prophet Daniel had been inspired by God to write that there would come a time when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). That these are mentioned together is no accident.

It was the travels of Marco Polo and others that awakened Europe to an interest in geography, navigation and their companion science, astronomy. Not long after, in the 14th century, began the "Renaissance." During this period, even before Columbus sailed to America, imperfect copies of ancient maps had surfaced, showing parts of the Caribbean Islands, South America, Antarctica or other long forgotten places. No longer was it doubted that the earth was spherical.

In the 16th century Copernicus restored the knowledge that the earth revolves around the sun. In the following century Galileo turned his telescope to the sky, and began to see evidence of the universe's true dimensions. He saw mountains and craters on the earth's moon, moons circling Jupiter, and the Milky Way's individual stars. He remarked, "I am filled with amazement and offer unending thanks to God that it has pleased Him to reveal through me such great wonders...."

With modern instruments such as the giant 200 inch telescope at Mt. Palomar, California, and more recently, the Hubble space telescope, launched in 1990, the James Webb Space Telescope, launched in December 2021, and other space and land based telescopes, astronomers have been able to see out much farther than in past ages. Much has been learned about the universe since the days of Galileo.

Yet, there are many unanswered questions. What has been learned about the size of the universe? Although distances within the solar system have been determined with a fair degree of certainty, estimates of distances for objects farther away vary considerably. For example, distances estimated for one of the nearest galaxies to our own, Andromeda, vary from one million to three million light-years. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, about 6 trillion miles.

Estimates of the distance to another nearby galaxy, NGC-5128, range from 7 to 16 million light-years. There are even wider variations in the estimates of the distances of objects farther away. The universe is so vast man has virtually no hope of ever measuring it as a whole. Even accurately measuring the part he can see presents tremendous obstacles.

While the Bible by no means contains all that there is to learn about our world and the universe, we regard the Bible as the foundation of knowledge--the key source for understanding not only how to live, but of how and why mankind and the whole universe came to exist.

Yet in our modern age of science and technology millions have come to view the Bible as out of date. Would it surprise you to learn that all along, for thousands of years, important clues as to the nature and size of the universe had been recorded and preserved in the pages of the Bible?

God knows how big the universe is. He knows how limited man is. Thousands of years ago He stated, in effect, that measuring the universe would forever be beyond mere human capability (Jeremiah 31:37). How many stars are there? Estimates of the number of stars within our own galaxy, the Milky Way, range from 100 billion to 400 billion.

It's believed that our most powerful telescopes can see some objects as far out as 13 billion light-years. Within that range are at least a hundred billion galaxies, possibly many more, averaging perhaps 10 billion stars each. Calculations based on the theory of relativity have led to guesses that the span of the universe may be 70 billion to 200 billion light years, containing trillions of galaxies. It's believed that the universe is continuing to expand so that we would never be able to see objects beyond a certain distance from our galaxy due to the rate of the expansion of the universe.

Once when asked how many stars there are in the universe, noted British astronomer Sir James Jeans said, "There must be as many stars in the universe as there are grains of sand on all the seashores of the world." Only in the twentieth century did modern science begun to grasp the truly awesome scope of the universe. Yet, thousands of years ago, authors of the Bible recorded the truth, revealed by the Creator Himself, that the stars of the heaven are innumerable for multitude, as are the grains of sand upon the seashore! (Genesis 22:17; Jeremiah 33:22; Hebrews 11:12).

Down through history, as far back at least as ancient Babylon, numerous star catalogs have been produced. One of the most ambitious attempts, never fully completed, began in 1887, when an international committee was formed to produce what is referred to as an "exhaustive" star catalog. Yet it was to catalog only eight to ten million stars! For all that has been achieved, the stars remain from the human perspective an "innumerable multitude."

A relatively small number of stars have been given names by the nations. But there is One greater than all mankind put together. "He," the Eternal God, Creator of the vast universe, "counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Psalms 147:4-5). The genius and power of God, revealed in His creation, is truly staggering.

Even more staggering, however, is the knowledge that God has destined mankind--those who believe the gospel, repent of sin, and prove faithful--to share as an inheritance the entire domain of the vast universe, not as fleshly beings, but spiritual, sharing the Divine nature, as children of God, sharing with the Creator His power and glory (1 Corinthians 15:42-53; Romans 8:17,32; Philippians 3:21; 2 Peter 1:4; Revelation 21:7). Lift your eyes towards the heavens, and think about that!

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE ISRAEL? (PART I)

By Rod Reynolds

According to Scripture, God chose the people of Israel, that is, the people descended from the patriarch Israel, as his chosen people. The people of Israel had a special and privileged relationship with God.

"O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones" (Psalms 105:6).

To many in our modern culture, the fact that God would designate a particular people to be "chosen," separate from other peoples of the earth, would seem grossly unfair, and would make God partial, and a respecter of persons. But the fact is, as is repeated in Scripture in various ways a number of times, "... there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

So, **why** did God choose Israel? Let's explore what the Bible has to say about this question.

Let's go back now to the beginning of human history. God had created Adam and Eve as the first pair of humans.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

God gave instructions to the first pair, Adam and Eve, but they rejected his commands, and chose to follow Satan instead (Genesis 3:1-6).

Adam and Eve had children, and their children had children, and the earth's population of human beings rapidly grew:

"This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died" (Genesis 5:1-7).

Others following lived similar long lives. So in that pre-flood era people tended to live for hundreds of years, and they produced sons and daughters, and their progeny produced sons and daughters. So the earth's population grew exponentially.

But the population of the earth, as it grew in numbers, grew further apart from the God who had created human beings in the first place.

"Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years'"(Genesis 6:1-3).

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:5-9).

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch'" (Genesis 6:11-14).

"And [God] did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly" (II Peter 2:5).

For a hundred and twenty years Noah, both through his works and preaching, warned the world of what was coming. "... when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (I Peter 3:20).

Yet, **no one** listened, excepting perhaps one or more members of his family. Of all the vast population of the earth, which no doubt numbered into the millions, and perhaps even billions of human beings, only Noah and his family, eight people altogether, were saved. Because Noah listened to God and obeyed him, while the rest of humanity would not listen, and rebelled.

After the flood, humans began to multiply once again on the earth.

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (Genesis 9:1).

"Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated" (Genesis 9:18-19).

In Genesis 10 it's related how the families of the earth originated. "These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood" (Genesis 10:32).

It wasn't but a relatively short time after the flood, when humankind sought to develop a **one world government of their own devising**. This system was centered in the person of a powerful leader, called Nimrod, reminiscent of the

"beast" of revelation (Revelation 17:13; 19:20). "Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar" (Genesis 10:8-10).

Gill in his commentary on Genesis 10:8 states: "...the name of Nimrod is usually derived from [a Hebrew word] **drm [marad]**, [meaning] 'to rebel', because he was a rebel against God, as is generally said; and because...he caused all the world to rebel against God, by the advice he gave to the generation of the division, or confusion of languages, the builders of Babel: he seems to be the same with Belus, the founder of Babel and of the Babylonian empire" (*John Gill's Expositor*).

Adam Clarke on Genesis 10:8: "His name Nimrod comes from, *marad*, he rebelled; and the Targum, on 1Ch 1:10, says: '*Nimrod began to be a mighty man in sin, a murderer of innocent men, and a rebel before the Lord.*' The Jerusalem Targum says: '...he said to them, *Depart from the religion of Shem, and cleave to the institutes of Nimrod.*' The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel says: 'From the foundation of the world none was ever found like Nimrod, powerful in hunting, and in rebellions against the Lord.' The Syriac calls him a *warlike giant*. The word *tsayid*, which we render *hunter*, signifies *prey*; and is applied in the Scriptures to the *hunting of men* by persecution, oppression, and tyranny. Hence it is likely that Nimrod, having acquired power, used it in tyranny and oppression; and by rapine and violence founded that domination which was the first distinguished by the name of a *kingdom* on the face of the earth" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*).

Keil and Delitzsh on Genesis 10:8-12: "Nimrod 'began to be a mighty one in the earth.' נמרד [Nimrod] is used here, as in Gen. 6:4, to denote a man who makes himself renowned for bold and daring deeds. Nimrod was mighty in hunting, and that in opposition to Jehovah.

.....
 "The name itself, Nimrod from [MaRaD] , 'we will revolt,' points to some violent resistance to God. It is so characteristic that it can only have been given by his contemporaries, and thus have become a proper name.

.....
 "Nimrod the hunter became a tyrant, a powerful hunter of men. This course of life gave occasion to the proverb, 'like Nimrod, a mighty hunter against the Lord,' which immortalized not his skill in hunting beasts, but the success of his hunting of men in the establishment of an imperial kingdom by tyranny and power. But if this be the meaning of the proverb,... 'in the face of Jehovah' can only mean in defiance of Jehovah, as Josephus and the Targums understand it.

.....
 "'And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel,' the well-known city of Babylon on the Euphrates, which from the time of Nimrod downwards has been the symbol of the power of the world in its hostility to God" (*Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*).

According to Josephus: "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an

affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!" (*Ant. I: iv: 2*).

The descendants of Cush inhabited the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:10; 11:2), "which most scholars consider to be Sumer" ("Who Was Nimrod?" biblearchaeology.org, first published in *Bible and Spade*, Summer 2001). It's suggested in this article that Nimrod was the same as Gilgamesh, known from clay tablets found in the ruins of Nineveh and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Nimrod, it is suggested, was not his given name, but a derisive epithet, descriptive of his character and behavior. "Our English translation of the Hebrew of Genesis 10:8-10 is weak. The author of this passage of Scripture will not call Gilgamesh by his name and honor him, but is going to call him by a derisive name, what he really is, a rebel. Therefore we should translate Genesis 10:8-10 to read:

"Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a tyrant in the earth. He was a tyrannical hunter in opposition to the Lord. Thus it is said, 'Nimrod the tyrannical opponent of YHWH [Yahweh]'" (*ibid.*).

Babylon after the flood became the font of rebellion and hostility toward God, through a system of idolatry and deception. That same system has deceived mankind through the ages. In Scripture it's called: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5).

God was not pleased with this. So he confused their tongues and scattered them abroad over the face of the earth: "Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Genesis 11:1-4).

"Often attributed to Nimrod, the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:1-9) was not a Jack and the Beanstalk-type of construction, where people were trying to build a structure to get into heaven. Instead it is best understood as an ancient ziggurat (Assyrian 'mountaintop').... A ziggurat was a man-made structure with a temple at its top, built to worship the host of heaven" ("Who Was Nimrod?" biblearchaeology.org).

"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do

will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:5-9).

Mankind had rebelled against God, rejecting his message. Nearly all the population of the earth had been destroyed by a flood. The rebellion continued after the flood, and became an organized system at Babylon.

Out of the God defying world of humanity, God called a man named Abraham.

"Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (Genesis 12:1-4).

Abram, or as he was later called, Abraham, proved faithful to God. And his son Isaac, also proved faithful, and the promises were passed down from Abraham through Isaac to Isaac's son Jacob, or **Israel**, who in turn was also counted faithful. It was their descendants who received from their forefathers the promises God had given them.

"There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to **Abraham your father**. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; **because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws**'" (Genesis 26:1-5).

God promised to reward these patriarchs who proved faithful to him **by blessing their descendants. The faith of Abraham, manifested in his obedience to God, became a model for anyone who wants to have a positive relationship with God.**

"Even as Abraham had faith in God, and it was put to his account as righteousness. Be certain, then, that those **who are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham**. And the holy Writings, seeing before the event that God would give the **Gentiles righteousness by faith**, gave the good news before to Abraham, saying, In you will **all the nations have a blessing**. So then **those who are of faith have a part in the blessing of Abraham who was full of faith**" (Galatians 3:6-9, Bible in Basic English version).

The faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a starting point for those who are to be chosen by God. As a physical nation God chose the descendants of Israel **because of the faith of their forebears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

Moses spoke to the people of Israel, as they were preparing to enter the land

of Canaan God had promised to them in the days of their ancestors:

"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and **take for Himself a nation** from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? **To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power,** driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day. **Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.** You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (Deuteronomy 4:32-40).

Reasons given here as to why God chose to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt include: (1) Because he loved their ancestors. God had a special affection for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, **because in a faithless, God defying world, they proved faithful.** (2) By working with Israel **he would reveal himself as the only true God, and there is none other.** (3) He chose them to reveal **his statutes and commandments, laws which would promote peace, health, tranquility, happiness, prosperity and longevity.**

God proposed a covenant with the nation of Israel, which they entered into of their own free will.

God instructed Moses: "... tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. **And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**'" "So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord" (Exodus 19:3-8; cf. Exodus 24:3).

Note that God told them if they were faithful to the covenant, by obeying his words, that they would be a **kingdom of priests.** This will be discussed in further detail in part 2 of this series, as it is a key reason God chose Israel.

God emphasized that **he did not choose Israel because of any special merit or greatness on their part,** but because of the promises to their forefathers. He made it clear that **continued favor with God would hinge on their faithfulness to the covenant in keeping his commandments.**

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. **The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;** but because the Lord loves you, and **because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers,** the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with **those who love Him and keep His commandments;** and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. **Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers"** (Deuteronomy 7:6-12).

Before they entered the land of Canaan, God had seen the stubbornness and faithlessness of the people of Israel. God had determined in his righteous judgment that the peoples of Canaan had become so wicked that they must be punished by being driven out of their land. But he made it clear to Israel that he had not been pleased by their conduct since leaving Egypt.

Speaking to Israel of the Canaanites, Moses told them that God would lead them and: **"He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you. Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.**

"Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you. When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the

tablets of the covenant. Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.' Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.' So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God--had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also" (Deuteronomy 9:1-19).

"Though the Canaanites **were expelled for their wickedness**, it does not follow, that the Israelites were established in their room on account of any distinguished virtue, or because they deserved it. On many occasions, it may be seen in the history of the world, that God punishes the wicked by the instrumentality of other men, who are as wicked as themselves. **Not the Israelites' righteousness, but the wickedness of the inhabitants, and the promise of God to their fathers, was the cause of their obtaining Canaan**" (comment on Deuteronomy 9:5, *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*).

What were the sins of the Canaanites that merited such drastic treatment? The are given in a summary fashion in Leviticus 18. They include incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, idolatry and child sacrifice. This is not a complete list of their transgressions, but only the most egregious of them. They had not only descended into gross immorality in terms of idolatry and sexual sins, but in their depraved worship of idols were regularly **murdering innocent human beings**.

God told them: "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and **the land vomits out its inhabitants**. You shall therefore **keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations**, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), **lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you**" (Leviticus 18:24-28).

God is not a respecter of persons. **He promised Israel that if they committed the same abominations as the Canaanites they too would be cast out of their inheritance**. In the next and final article in this series this discussion of why God chose the peoples of Israel, and how it directly affects you and the rest of mankind, will continue.

In This Issue

Thanksgiving

We are admonished in Scripture to offer Thanksgiving to God. It's always fitting for us to reflect on our obligation to Give thanks.

Find and Remain in the True Church (Part 1)

How can you know if you are in the true Church? And if you are in the true Church, how can you stay in the true Church of God?

The Foundation on Which the True Church of God is Built

Is human authority the foundation of the Church of God, or is it the authority of Jesus Christ?

What Will You Inherit?

Just what is the inheritance God has in store for his children? And what does it take to have a part in that inheritance?

How BIG is the Universe?

Maybe you've wondered, how many stars are there? Just how big is the Universe?

Why Did God Choose Israel? (Part 1)

The Bible reveals that God separated descendants of Abraham to be a chosen people? Why?