

# MESSENGER

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FULFILL YOUR DESTINY

Winter 2024

Why Study the Bible?

Find and Remain in the True Church -- Part 2

God and Money

Why Did God Choose Israel -- Part 2

Do You Know God?

# MESSENGER Magazine

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While billions of Bibles have been printed, and it has been translated into virtually every major language, few read it regularly, and even fewer study it. Yet there are many good reasons to study the Bible and learn of its teachings. What to look for to avoid deception, and truly follow God. Managing your money effectively and keeping it in proper perspective can add a great deal of enjoyment to your life. When God chose the descendants of Abraham he did it with the ultimate purpose of making salvation available to all the peoples of the earth. The Bible reveals how you can know God, and how you can know that you know God.

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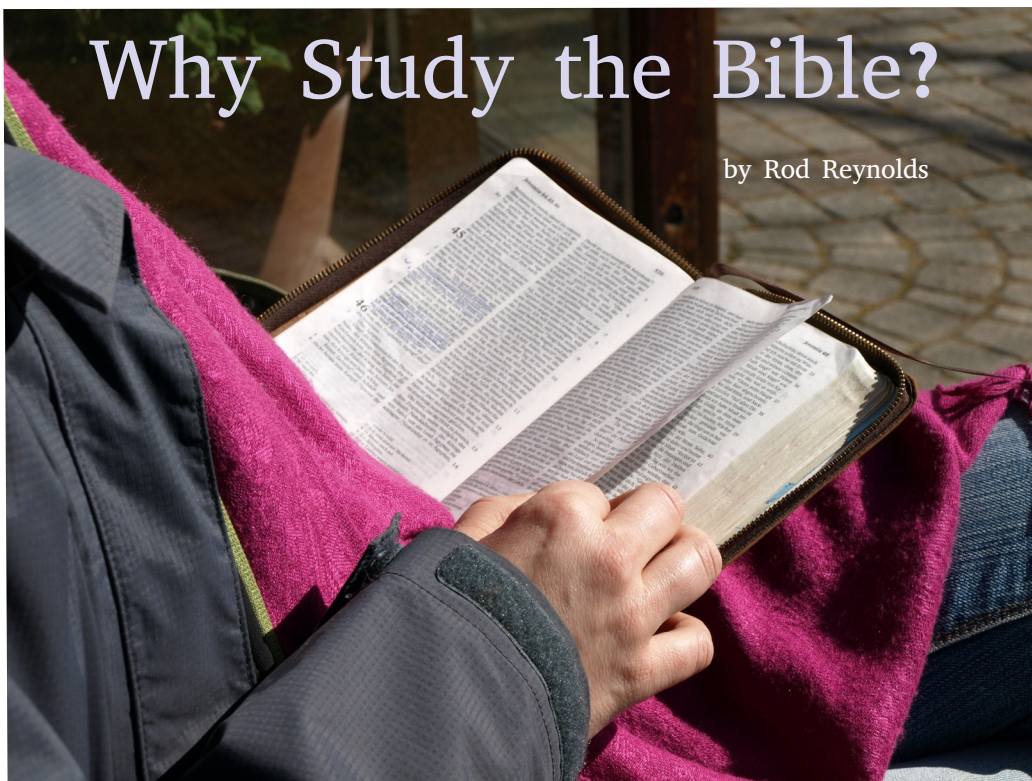
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# Why Study the Bible?

by Rod Reynolds



The world is beset by problems of every description, and particularly by problems of behavior and morality. The Bible provides answers to the most fundamental questions of life, such as why you exist, and your potential destiny. Its admonitions provide a sound anchor and structure on which your life can be built, giving you an incomparable sense of direction and purpose.

If you sense that your life is aimless, and out of control, or if you sense that the world is coming apart, and headed for disaster, which it is, hope and redemption are available. The Bible can guide you to the source of hope and redemption, and give you an understanding of what the future

King Solomon wrote, "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). But of all the countless books that have been written, is there any that reliably answers the most fundamental and important questions of life? Why do we exist? What is our nature? Is there a God, and if so, what is God like? What does God expect of us? Can we know the true God? Does God love us? Is there a path that can put an end to violence, unnecessary suffering and sorrow? What happens when we die? Is there a way to eternal life, and if so, what is it?

Believe it or not, there is such a book, a book that has the answers to these questions, and other questions vital to the life of every human. That book is called the Bible. The Bible is unlike any other, and has no equal, because it is God's revelation to mankind of knowledge that can be found in no other source.

Do you know what the Bible says? Have you read it? Have you studied the Bible diligently to learn what God wants you to know? Why study the Bible? In this article you will find answers

to this question of vital importance to every human being.

Nearly every household (about nine out of ten) in the United States has at least one Bible. However, more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible. Perhaps about one in five read the Bible daily ("Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don't Actually Read It," [lifewayresearch.com](http://lifewayresearch.com), April 25, 2017).

In many other countries my guess is that even fewer people read the Bible regularly, if at all. And that means that most people really don't know much about the Bible.

Yet, there are many good reasons not only to read the Bible, but to study the Bible and come to understand its teachings. There are more reasons to study the Bible than can be covered in a single article.

But in this article are discussed several reasons to study the Bible. Consider the following:

(1) Bible study can change your life, for the better.

holds for mankind.

The prophet Hosea lamented: "**Hear the word of the Lord**, You children of Israel, For the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn'" (Hosea 4:1-3).

All too often, that describes much of the world in which we live.

But the Bible tells us also, "He who **heeds the word** wisely will find good" (Proverbs 16:20). "Happy is the man **who finds wisdom**, And the man who gains understanding" (Proverbs 3:13).

God assures us that if we consistently obey his words, the words found in Scripture, things will go well for us, as we avoid many of the pitfalls that disregard for God's commandments produces. And that applies to nations as well as individuals. "Observe and obey **all these words** which I com-

mand you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 12:28).

The Bible points to a time in the future when the Scriptures will be made known to all. God’s kingdom is destined to be established on the earth, and all nations will be taught God’s word. “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And **the word of the Lord** from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:3-4).

Not only will there be peace on the earth, but great joy. “All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, When they **hear the words of Your mouth**. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, For great is the glory of the Lord” (Psalms 138:4-5). “Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth” (Psalms 67:4).

For those willing to be taught, Scripture says: “You [God] will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalms 16:11). “But He [Jesus] said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who **hear the word of God and keep it!**’” (Luke 11:28).

By studying and obeying the Bible’s teachings, you can set out now on that journey down the path of life, a life that leads to fulfillment and joy.

(2) Bible study reveals the way that leads to eternal life.

Not only can the Bible teach you how to live a happier life now, but it also re-

veals the path to life for all eternity, difficult as that may be to believe!

The Bible has the potential to transform your life and help you grow in the grace and knowledge of God as you obey, which in turn leads to eternal life that only God can give you.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God personified. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**” (John 1:14).

The one spoken of as “the Word” in these verses is Jesus Christ. The words of the Bible are his words, the written word of God, inspired by God’s Holy Spirit. And in them are revealed the way to eternal life.

“...prophecy [the Bible] never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Peter admonished believers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18).

Peter said to Jesus, “You have the **words of eternal life**” (John 6:68).

To be granted eternal life in God’s Kingdom we must—with God’s help—grow and develop spiritually in the likeness of Christ.

We’re admonished, “As newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby**” (1 Peter 2:1).

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that, “... the **word of God, ... effectively works in you who believe**” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

In the Bible are the necessary information and instructions for us to become recipients of the gift of eternal life, which is given to those who repent of sin and put God’s word to work in their lives. Paul wrote to Timothy, “... from childhood you have known the **Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make

you **wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God**, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Speaking to a group of Church leaders who had been called to Miletus, a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, to meet with him, Paul said, as he was about to depart for Jerusalem, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the **word** of His grace, **which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**” (Acts 20:32).

For us to have eternal life we must bear spiritual fruit acceptable to God. Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away**” (John 15:1-2).

Jesus spoke a parable of a sower and seed, recorded in Matthew 13. For various reasons some of the seed that was sown produced no fruit. The seed in the parable is the **word of God**. For the word of God to bear fruit it must have a hospitable host, which in the parable is the “good ground.” “... he who received seed on the good ground is he who **hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty**” (Matthew 13:23).

If you are to have eternal life, **God’s word** must take root in your heart and mind and coupled with the power of God’s Spirit bear the life changing fruits of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “**The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life**” (John 6:63).

**If God’s word is working in your mind and heart his Spirit is working there**, and if God’s Spirit is working in your mind and heart, it will be shown



by the fruits you bear. “Now the **works of the flesh are evident**, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, **let us also walk in the Spirit**. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:19-26).

If we are to bear these spiritual fruits, we must **abide in the word of God**, we must study it, and apply it with understanding. Understanding comes from **hearing and applying God’s word**, his commandments. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; **A good understanding have all those who do His commandments**” (Psalms 111:10).

The people in Berea (a city in Macedonia, or northern Greece) who heard and accepted the message of the gospel, the **word of God**, are praised because, “...they **received the word** with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**” (Acts 17:11).

“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And **in His law he meditates day and night**. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalms 1:1-3).

Paul admonished Timothy: “Be diligent

to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing [or applying] the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15).

(3) Study the Bible as a source of wisdom and understanding.

Moses said to the people of Israel: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for **this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’**” (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

The Bible contains words of wisdom and instruction from God. And the book of Proverbs is specifically written to convey wisdom and instruction. “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know **wisdom and instruction**, To perceive the **words of understanding**, To receive the **instruction of wisdom**, Justice, judgment, and equity; To give **prudence to the simple**, To the young man **knowledge and discretion**” (Proverbs 1:1-4).

“But **whoever listens to me** [God’s words of wisdom and instruction] will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil” (Proverbs 1:33).

“My son, if you **receive my words**, And **treasure my commands** within you, So that you **incline your ear to wisdom**, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, **If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures**; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For **the Lord gives wisdom**; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up **sound wisdom for the upright**; He is a shield to those who

walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. Then you will **understand** righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path. When **wisdom enters your heart**, And knowledge is pleasant to your soul, Discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things, From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice in doing evil, And delight in the perversity of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, And who are devious in their paths” (Proverbs 2:1-15).

Where do you seek for the wisdom and instruction described in this passage of Scripture? In the word of God.

The aim of this is found in the following: “So you may walk in the way of goodness, And keep to the paths of righteousness. For the upright will dwell in the land, And the blameless will remain in it; But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it” (Proverbs 2:20-22).

“My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, **Write them on the tablet of your heart**, And so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:1-4).

“Happy is the man who **finds wisdom**, And the man who gains understanding; For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, And all her paths are peace. She is **a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who retain her**” (Proverbs 3:13-18).

**“Get wisdom!** Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. **Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom.** And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you” (Proverbs 4:5-9).

“My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; **For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life**” (Proverbs 4:20-23).

Here is the wisdom of God speaking: “Now therefore, **listen to me,** my children, For blessed are those who keep my ways. **Hear instruction and be wise,** And do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors. For **whoever finds me finds life,** And obtains favor from the Lord; But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All **those who hate me love death**” (Proverbs 8:32-36).

**This wisdom is freely available to you. The only cost is the time and effort it takes to drink in of it by studying God’s word.**

(4) Study the Bible because it is proven and sure.

The principles revealed in the Bible are not ephemeral, or short lived, like fads in social trends or mores founded on weak principles or foundations of sand.

Today we live in a world where godliness is often scorned and ridiculed, and rotten, gross, immoral behavior is celebrated and promoted.

This was prophesied to happen, as it happened in ancient times. **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!”** (Isaiah 5:20-21).

“He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15).

“So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free” (Malachi 3:15). That all too often describes the world we live in. **However, the words and precepts of the Bible are sure, certain and tested by time. They are eternal precepts and values reflecting the mind of the Eternal and Almighty God.**

“The works of His hands are verity and justice; All His precepts **are sure. They stand fast forever and ever,** And are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalms 111:7-10).

“The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments **endures forever**” (Psalms 119:160).

“As for God, His way is perfect; **The word of the Lord is proven;** He is a shield to all who trust in Him” (2 Samuel 22:31).

“The grass withers, the flower fades, **But the word of our God stands forever**” (Isaiah 40:8).

When you study and drink in of God’s word, and apply it in your life, you can rest assured that you are following a proven path that will not fail to reward you in the end. Yes, there may be, in-

deed will be, trials and difficulties along the way, but the end result is that you will stand, when others who’ve gone a different way will have fallen.

The Bible is replete with types and antitypes, recurring themes and patterns expressed often in historical and prophetic events—varying in detail, but similar in outline. These contain vital lessons from past experiences and events, and, in prophetic outline, the “history of the future,” written in advance, by which we may be admonished.

“Therefore whoever **hears these sayings of Mine, and does them,** I will liken him to a wise man who **built his house on the rock:** and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it **did not fall,** for it was **founded on the rock.** But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and **does not do them,** will be like a **foolish man** who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; **and it fell. And great was its fall**” (Matthew 7:24-27).

When the children of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, having wandered in the wilderness for forty years, they were given these instructions:

“When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

.....

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that **he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book,** from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be



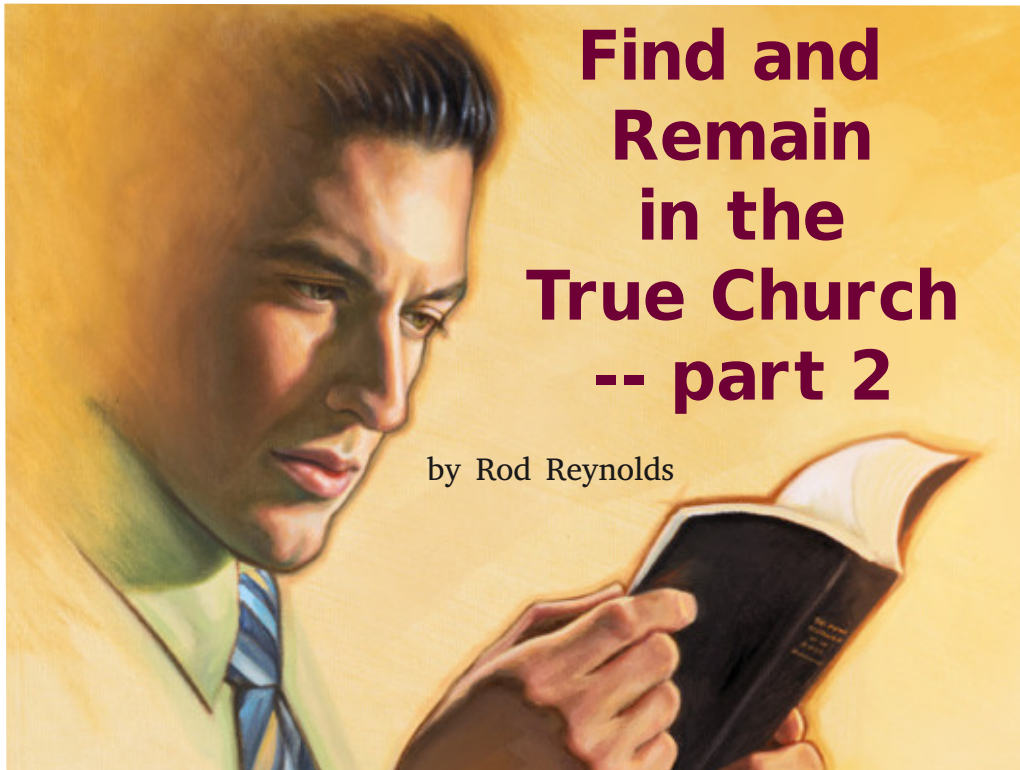
with him, and **he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the**

**midst of Israel"** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15; 18-20).

If you are in the first resurrection, you too are destined to share a role in the kingdom of God administering the government under Jesus Christ. "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ,

and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

Anyone who desires a better life; anyone who desires eternal life; anyone who desires wisdom and understanding; anyone who desires to walk on a sure path; anyone who aspires to be in God's Kingdom, should study the Bible all the days of his life.



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, or follow a particular leader, who may claim to have some exalted office, or some special relationship with God?

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?

In a previous article, I addressed these questions primarily from the perspective of a Church organization. We learned that we are not called into a Church organization of this world, but our baptism is into Jesus Christ, and his death.

We ended with the conclusion that, "Wherever an assembly of God's true Church is, it will be walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments."

In this article, part 2 of "Find and Remain in the True Church" I intend to focus more on leaders who claim the

loyalty of people who have believed their claims to authority in the name of Jesus Christ. What is your obligation in evaluating the claims of any would be leader? Should you follow someone based on his claims to be an "apostle," or a "prophet," or "evangelist," or some other exalted office.

Many have fallen prey to leaders who make such claims. How can you avoid deception, and be sure the leaders with whom you choose to associate are genuine?

As mentioned earlier, the first article of this series ended with the conclusion that, "Wherever an assembly of God's true Church is, it will be walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments."

The Sabbath command was given to help us remember who is the true God, and that it is he who makes us holy. "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, **that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you**'" (Exodus 31:13). If we reject the Sabbath, or any of God's holy ten commandments, or other commandments as applicable under the New Covenant, we will forget the true God. "Beware that you **do not forget** the Lord your God **by not keeping His commandments**, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today" (Deuteronomy 8:11). To reject even one of God's commandments is, in principal, to reject them all. "For whoever hath kept the whole law, and yet hath offended in one point, hath become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

The context makes it clear that James was referring to the ten commandments, and ancillary laws. "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do

well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder' [examples from the ten commandments]. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:8-12).

If anyone rejects the commandments of God, he is in doing so rejecting God. Notice: "Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah...who...said, Thus says God: 'Why do you **transgress the commandments** of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have **forsaken the Lord**, He also has forsaken you'" (2 Chronicles 24:20). When anyone forsakes the commandments of God as applicable under the New Covenant, he is forsaking God.

Some apostate leaders, quoting and misapplying Hebrews 13:5, have assured brethren that God "will never leave you nor forsake you," the implication being, as long as they remain attached to a particular corporate body. Yet in this very verse, as well as the overall context, Paul relates this promise to our *conduct*. He quoted the promise from Deuteronomy. 31:5-6, where it is placed in the context of Israel overcoming her enemies **in accordance with God's commandments**. He said, "The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:5-6).

But the promise that God would not leave nor forsake them was conditional. In this very context God warned Israel that when they forsook him and broke his covenant then he would forsake them. God spoke to Moses and said, "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and **I will forsake them**, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'" (Deuteronomy 31:16-17).

In the New Testament, too, we are warned against denying or forsaking God through disobedience: "They profess to know God, but **in works they deny Him**, being abominable, **disobedient**, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). The Greek *arneomai*, translated *deny* in this verse in the NKJV, according to *Strong's* Concordance and other sources, means "to contradict, i.e. disavow, reject, abnegate [renounce]: deny, refuse." In practical terms to deny God is to forsake him.

Turning God's grace into license to break his law is also denying, or forsaking God. "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who **turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Jude 1:4). Just as God rejected Israel when they forsook him through disobedience to his word, he will forsake us, individually or collectively, if we do the same: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny



us" (2 Timothy 2:12). If we forsake God through rejecting his commandments *then* we have effectively left the true Church of God. To remain part of the true Church, on the other hand, we must, as God's word instructs, reject leaders who turn from God's law.

Some have become convinced that some particular individual, usually making extravagant claims about himself, is "God's anointed," and that hence they must follow him no matter what. Actually, all of God's true ministers are "anointed," in the sense of having been set apart by the Holy Spirit to their offices. But all are free moral agents. Any can disqualify himself. Paul knew that he could become disqualified. He wrote, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, **I myself should become disqualified**" (I Corinthians 9:27).

If Paul could become disqualified, anyone could. Satan was God's anointed, an archangel, until he sinned. Then he was cast out as profane from God's presence. "You were the **anointed cherub** who covers [among the highest ranking of the angels]; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones" (Ezekiel 28:14-16). Saul was anointed king over Israel "Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his [Saul's] head, and kissed him and said: 'Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?'" (I Samuel 10:1). But because of Saul's disobedience to God he was later rejected as King. Samuel said to

Saul, after he had repeatedly failed to be faithful, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (I Samuel 15:23).

And there are many similar examples in the Scriptures. The true "anointed One" to whom we must always be faithful regardless of cost is Christ, our Messiah, our "anointed One." He is the supreme "anointed of God," according to God's word: "You have **loved righteousness and hated lawlessness**; therefore God, Your God, has **anointed You** [Jesus Christ] with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Hebrews 1:9).

We are to test those who claim the mantle of apostleship, or of being ministers of Christ. Those who are false apostles or false ministers are deceitful, and speak lies. The Apostle Paul wrote of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" (II Corinthians 11:13). Jesus Christ speaking to the Ephesus church, said "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).

The standard by which we judge is God's word. God's word is truth. Jesus said in prayer to God, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). We place ourselves in jeopardy if we follow leaders who lead us into error. "For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and **those who are led by them are destroyed**" (Isaiah 9:16). Why do you think we are warned so many times in Scripture to be vigilant and wary?

We are sanctified, made separate

from the world, by the Holy Spirit and **belief in the truth**: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through **sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**" (2 Thessalonians 2:13; compare John 17:17). That is what makes us a part of the true body of Christ—not clinging to an organization or some particular leader which or who rejects truth and openly endorses and encourages sin. True Christians are described in Scripture as those "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). And the saints, those sanctified or separated to God's purpose, are described as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

When Paul wrote, "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:18), he was writing in the context of the different ways in which individual members can contribute to the work to which the body of Christ is called (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). He was certainly not recommending following into apostasy leaders who reject God's word. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (I Corinthians 12:4-11).

In this same context, in fact, he emphasizes the **unity of spirit** characteristic of God's true Church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Whatever the particular station or role of anyone in the Church, we are to share the same Spirit, that is, the Spirit of God.

Paul warns against those preaching another Jesus. He **warns of receiving a different spirit**, or a different gospel. "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" (II Corinthians 11:4). Or "... how well you put up with these things" (Bible in Basic English). "... then you listen too much" (Bible in Worldwide English). Paul is saying to them that ironically they are more willing to listen to false teachers all too often than to those who teach the truth. As *Gill's* commentary remarks, they "receive his doctrine, submit to his authority, and prefer him to the apostles."

A different spirit is now at work in the world, including the professed Christian world. It is a spirit that has led to mass confusion and profound *disunity!*

Should we follow someone merely because he claims the mantle of Moses, or who claims to be at the head of "God's government"? Or who claims to be the Vicar of Christ? Moses was a *type of Jesus Christ*. He was not a type of any human leader of this age. Jesus Christ, not any fleshly human being, is the "Apostle and High Priest of our confession." Christ is the "Son over His own House, whose house we are if we hold fast ... to the end" (He-

brews 3:1, 6).

There are ministers, or leaders of Churches, who claim that we can have access to God only through them. Yet, according to Scripture, our access to God is not through any merely human leader, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus..." (1 Timothy 2:5). Don't be deceived by anyone who accuses of rebellion those who remain faithful to the truth of God, and Jesus Christ, who is the Captain of our salvation according to Scripture (Hebrews 2:10, KJV). The Greek for "Captain" here is ἀρχηγός (*archegos*), which could also be translated author, or chief leader. Jesus Christ far outranks any mere human leader.

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but **Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness'" (Hebrews 3:1-8).

"For we have become partakers of Christ if we **hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end**" (Hebrews 3:14).

Here's what you should do: If your

leaders are faithfully following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, follow them. Never put them in the place of Christ. But do as Paul instructed when he said, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). The condition for continuing to follow (or imitate, as it is in the Greek) the example and teaching of human leaders is that they must be faithfully following Christ's example and teaching.

But we are warned *not* to follow leaders who teach falsehood and depart from the truth. In warning of false teachers John wrote, "Beloved, **do not** imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (3 John 1:11). The ministers of God are warned against departing "from the way," causing others "to stumble at the law" (Malachi 2:8). We are warned that those *who follow* leaders who teach lies, causing the people to err, will be destroyed. "The elder and honorable, he is the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err, And those who are led by them are destroyed" (Isaiah 9:15-16).

We are instructed, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge" (Proverbs 14:7). We are urged to "note those who cause division and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned [that is, the doctrine preserved in Scripture], and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). We are warned, "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" (2 Peter 2:1-2). These are those who promise a false "li-



berty," causing those who had escaped the pollutions of the world to become entangled in them again. "For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, **to turn from the holy commandment** delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:19-21).

The burden is on **us** to weigh and to judge whom to follow. Jesus said, "**Beware** of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He **often** warned his followers to beware of deceivers. Paul warned, "Beware **lest any man** spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8, KJV). John wrote, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God..." (1 John 4:1). Jesus warned those of the Philadelphia church, "Behold, I come quickly! **Hold fast** what you have, that **no one** may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). These are just a few of the many warnings in Scripture for us to check up, prove, and make certain that we follow the leadership only of those who are faithful to God's word and his commandments.

If you would abide in the Church, abide in Christ. If you would abide in Christ, John gives us an outline to follow. John saw the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and the early Church being cast aside for doctrines more appealing to the carnal mind. John wrote: "Therefore let that abide in you which you **heard from the beginning**. If what you **heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father**" (1 John 2:24). From the Scriptures we learn what was taught from the beginning, by Jesus Christ and the apostles, and the true prophets of God who preceded them. John was witness in his time to the same kind of

freewheeling "Christianity" that we see in our day, characterized by the rejection of basic principles of God's law and the substitution of man made ideas.

The idea of a "progressive revelation" that contradicts the teachings of Christ and the apostles and renders Scripture obsolete is a fiction of apostates who reject Christ's teachings. Paul, the likely author of the book of Hebrews, wrote, "Therefore we must give the more **earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away**. For if the word spoken through angels [messengers] proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which **at the first** began to be spoken by the Lord, and was **confirmed to us by those who heard Him**, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" (Hebrews 2:1-4).

To remain in the true Church of God requires that we abide in Christ. To abide in Christ we must keep his word. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ and the apostles revealed in Scripture. John wrote, "Now he who **keeps His commandments abides in Him**, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom [or which] He has given us" (1 John 3:24). And finally, "Whoever **transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ** [note "doctrine of Christ," not any mere human leader] does not have God. He who **abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son**" (1 John 1:9). If you have any questions for us regarding this subject, please see contact information on the inside cover.

***Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you -- Exodus 31:13***

***They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work -- Titus 1:16***

***For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end -- Hebrews 3:14***

***Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God -- III John 1:11***

***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***

***Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. -- II John 1:9***



Can money buy happiness? Many people who have more than enough money live empty, frustrated and miserable lives. But it's also true that learning to properly manage your money, and keeping it in proper perspective, can add a great deal to your enjoyment of life.

How? There are several ways. First, wisely managing your money can help you avoid the curses of poverty, of chronic indebtedness, of never having enough to "make ends meet." Secondly, godly money management can keep you from being enslaved by such evils as greed, avarice, miserliness and lust for material possessions. Third, implementing a godly perspective towards money can help you reap the blessings inherent in exercising the principle "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Let's look at each of these in greater detail.

#### Manage Money Wisely – Avoid Poverty

Contrary to a common belief, poverty

is not a trait of righteousness and it is not a sin to be rich. God himself is rich inasmuch as he is the owner of everything. "All that is in heaven and in earth is yours... O Lord" (1 Chronicles 29:11). And he is the one who makes it possible for others to be rich. "Both riches and honor come from You..." (1 Chronicles 29:12; cf. Deuteronomy 8:18).

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, David, and Solomon are examples of men who worshiped God and were very wealthy. Having wealth, and at the same time being able to use it wisely to enhance life's joys, are gifts from God. "As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him the power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor -- this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life [or be unduly concerned about the brevity of life, or its trials], because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart" (Ecclesiastes 5:19-20). Poverty, by contrast, is an affliction that often brings with it destruction and death. "The destruction of the poor is their poverty" (Proverbs 10:15).

There are many factors that can be involved in individual wealth or poverty. Some factors may be beyond what individuals have control over. But there are other factors which individuals can control if they have the knowledge and will. When we're talking about wise money management, we're really talking about managing yourself, because self control is the key to handling money wisely. This will become more and more evident as we proceed.

**Learning to save**, and saving from an early age, can be an important factor in effective money management. But the natural tendency, especially when young, is to spend all you have on immediate and temporary pleasures. The Bible describes as foolish those who squander what they have. "There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it" (Proverbs 21:20). Even if you're older, it isn't too late to begin learning lessons in wise money management, and working to get your finances under control.

The lowly ant is used in the Bible not

only as an example of industriousness but of wisdom in saving a portion of what is earned. "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8).

Joseph was inspired by God to save the grain in Egypt, during years of plenty, so that when years of leanness came there was enough (Genesis 41:47-49, 53-57). The principle of saving so that your money grows with interest is illustrated in the parable of the talents. The Lord told the unprofitable servant, "... you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest" (Matthew 25:27). If you started saving just \$100 a month at age 20, assuming an average ten percent growth rate annually compounded quarterly, you'd have accumulated over a million dollars by age 65.

How could you earn an average ten percent growth rate? **There are no guarantees, especially in today's volatile world.** War and other calamities can wipe out any accumulated wealth very quickly. The Bible predicts just such calamities as the the end of this age approaches. In a day of God's wrath and judgment to come, the Bible prophesies, "They will throw their silver into the streets, And their gold will be like refuse; Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them In the day of the wrath of the Lord" (Ezekiel 7:19).

Nevertheless, wisely saving and investing is a sound practice that can pay off, in more ordinary circumstances. Don't assume you need not plan for the future because you think Christ will return and this age will end in just a few years. Some erroneously used such reasoning decades ago, forgoing having children, getting an education, saving for the future, depriving them-

selves of the opportunity for a richer and happier life.

Many deceivers have come along claiming to know the day of Christ's coming. They've all been **wrong!** While we can see clearly the signs of the times we're in, **none of us knows the exact time of Christ's coming, nor how many years out into the future it will be.** "But of that day and hour **no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

The principles we're discussing are valid today, and will be valid far into the future. The wise approach is to plan as though you were going to live out your full life in this age. But be ready at all times for Christ's return. **"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.** But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. **Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"** (Matthew 24:42-44).

Despite the uncertainty of the times we live in, wisely saving and investing is a sound practice that can pay off, in ordinary circumstances. A typical bank savings account isn't likely to pay anywhere near a ten percent annual return. Putting your savings in a jar in the form of unstable currency such as the American dollar or any similar currency that is constantly losing value through inflation and devaluation isn't likely to make you wealthier over the long term. Indeed, it will tend to make you poorer.

True wealth doesn't come from government printing presses producing fiat "money," nor from entering numbers into a government database. True wealth doesn't magically appear out of thin air. **True wealth** comes from what is **produced**, usually involving **cap-**

**tal, labor, and resources.** **Capital** is money gained or saved from previous production. **Labor** is productive work. **Resources** may include land, structures, machines, equipment, utilities, raw materials, transportation, or other resources necessary to producing and marketing a product. Intelligent and efficient management of these assets also are necessary to a favorable outcome. What it takes to produce true wealth is a lesson too many in today's world have yet to learn, including a good many politicians, and so-called "economists."

If you have a business (which implies producing something of value), and reasonably expect the business to grow, you may, by **investing** in your business, achieve a real ten percent annual growth rate, or even more. If you work for a salary (which implies producing something of value by your labor), you may consider the option of saving some of your earnings by **investing** in the stock market. In other words, **putting capital you've acquired to work in a productive enterprise.** "It might surprise you to learn that a \$10,000 investment in the S&P 500 index 50 years ago would be worth nearly \$1.2 million today. Stock investing, when done well, is among the most effective ways to build long-term wealth" ("How to Invest in Stocks," Matthew Frankel, fool.com, October 5, 2020).

Stock prices fluctuate significantly on a day to day or even a year to year basis, but over time, and on average, stock values tend to grow. "According to global investment bank Goldman Sachs, 10-year stock market returns have averaged 9.2% over the past 140 years. Between 2010 and 2020, however, the investing firm notes that the S&P 500 has done slightly better than the historic 10-year average, with an annual average return of 13.6% in the past 10 years" ("The average stock market return over the past 10 years," Liz Knueven, businessinsi-



der.com, August 24, 2020). Other sources may give similar but different figures. Measuringworth.com calculates that the annualized growth rates in leading American stock indexes from October 1, 2010 through September 30, 2020 were as follows: Dow Jones Industrial Average, 9.74%; S&P 500, 11.39%; NASDAQ, 16.8%.

Investing in a stock market index and keeping it over a long term may be one of the surest ways to saving and investing for long term growth. Remember the figures quoted are averages, and could vary significantly from your personal experience. Even if the rate of growth in your investments are less, say only five percent average per year, you can still build substantial wealth over time.

Working and saving so you'll have plenty when later in life you are unable to work or simply want to be more financially secure, is a most important principle in learning to manage your money. Another advantage of saving part of your money is that you're not as likely to have to borrow and be in debt.

There may be occasions when borrowing is necessary, if not desirable. For example, does it make sense to pay rent indefinitely to someone else for a place to live, or, if possible, to buy a house with a mortgage, and pay a similar amount monthly for property you can own in ten or fifteen years? The answer may not be the same for everyone, but it's a question worth considering. Borrowing to start a business may or may not make sense, depending on the circumstances.

Nevertheless, by saving diligently for anticipated needs or unexpected emergencies borrowing can be kept to a minimum, if not eliminated altogether. Remember, when you borrow you put yourself in the position of being a servant to the lender, and

(where interest is involved) he is profiting off of your labor. "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). By saving, you can put yourself in the position of the lender and owner, who profits from the labor of others.

A good plan if you are already in debt is to begin to work to get out of debt in a systematic way. First, change your spending habits. Put yourself on a budget. Start keeping track of every dollar you earn and every dollar you spend. Get rid of your credit cards and start operating on a cash basis. Or if you use a credit card, make sure to use one that doesn't charge interest if the balance is paid off monthly, and budget to make sure the balance is paid off on time each month. Eliminate spending that's not absolutely necessary. You'll find some other tips on saving at: "How to Save Money: 20 Simple Tips," daveramsey.com, September 3, 2020).

Plan your spending so you know where your money is going. Cut your expenses by cutting out all unnecessary spending. Make sure your tithes and basic necessities are taken care of. "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:11). "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it'" (Malachi 3:8-10).

After seeing to your financial obligation to God, and basic necessities, begin setting aside money to build up an

emergency fund – say \$1000. Or if that seems out of reach, perhaps \$500, and keep adding to it regularly until you have a reasonably safe cushion for emergencies. Once you've done that start paying off your debts as fast as you can – beginning with the smallest. If you have to, get an extra job for awhile. Keep working at it until your debts are paid off, and then start a savings program so you can avoid future indebtedness. As you do your part, also ask God for his guidance and blessings.

Saving money, and managing money effectively, requires moderation and self-discipline. There are many ways in which a lack of self control will lead you to poverty. Being lazy or irresponsible is one way. "He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes one rich" (Proverbs 10:4). An important part of living responsibly is planning and preparing for the future. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but **those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty**" (Proverbs 21:5). **This tells us that working hard is not enough. One should also strive to "work smart."**

Decisions made in haste, without sound planning or consideration, tend to fail. "Get rich quick" schemes seldom succeed. There are times when quick thinking and acting are necessary, but usually this involves being ready when the time comes to act by previous study, planning and preparation.

That means plan your life. If you are young, just starting out, it would be wise to plan to get an education so you can do what you like to do for a living, not just what you have to do. Don't be hasty in making decisions about a career, choosing a mate, or any other important matter in life. Be open minded. Get the facts.

Before marriage, get to know yourself, and any potential marriage partner well. Don't rush into marriage or let someone pressure you into it. Ask God for guidance and wisdom and to lead you into the choices you make. Remember the character of the person you marry will drastically affect your future life. "A prudent wife is from the Lord" (Proverbs 19:14).

Before settling on a career choice, learn about many careers. Analyze your interests. Find out where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Also, analyze your options. What are the chances of your success in earning a living from various options you may consider? Pray diligently and ask God for guidance. Planning properly is an important key to success in any endeavor. Even if you're older and already married and in a career, planning for the future is important.

Being intemperate in food and drink has led many to skid row. "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:11). The same is true of going to excess or practicing lawlessness in seeking any other physical pleasure. "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17).

Sexual immorality, especially, tends to result not only in dishonor, but in poverty. "A companion of harlots wastes his wealth" (Proverbs 29:3). "By means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread" (Proverbs 6:26). Many men, and women, have lost careers, families and fortunes because of immoral sexual conduct.

It's no accident that the greatest number of "poor," as defined by the government, and thus receiving welfare assistance in the United States, are single women along with their children. Many of these are children born out of wedlock and their mothers, and children and their mothers who are di-

vorced, often because of sexual misconduct by one or both partners in marriage (*Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?*, National Center For Policy Analysis, 1994, pp. 14-15). More than half the marriages in the United States end in divorce, and financial problems and infidelity are often listed as the two top reasons couples divorce.

For decades the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in the United States has been spiraling upwards. For the first time in the nation's history, in 1999, the government reported that fully one third of children born in the nation were born to unmarried women ("Unwed Mothers Set a Record for Births," *Washington Times*, 4-18-2001). By 2005 the percentage had continued to climb to 37 percent, according to government statistics (Associated Press, November 21, 2006). "When the War on Poverty began in the mid-1960s, only 6 percent of children were born out of wedlock. Over the next four and a half decades, the number rose rapidly. In 2010, 40.8 percent of all children born in the U.S. were born outside of marriage," ("Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty," Robert Rector, heritage.org, September 5, 2012). For decades the percentage of births to unwed mothers in many of major cities in the USA has exceeded fifty percent. "...more than half [of children born] in many large cities are born outside of marriage" ("Non-Marital Births and Child Poverty in the United States," Isabell V. Sawhill, brookings.edu, June 29, 1999). In the city of Baltimore, Maryland, it's reported in 2018, the rate of out-of-wedlock births was over seventy percent ("Fix Baltimore with fewer out-of-wedlock births," baltimoresun.com, June 4, 2018).

Other countries are facing similar trends. For example, "Latin America is now the region that has the highest percentage of children born out of wedlock. In Colombia, 84 percent of

all children are born to unmarried mothers. Argentina, Mexico, Chile and other countries throughout the region have similar numbers, with well over half of all children born outside wedlock," ("All Across Latin America, Unwed Mothers Are Now The Norm," Lulu Garcia-Navarro, npr.org, December 14, 2015). Many European countries also have shockingly high rates of out-of-wedlock births. In "...Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway and Sweden, the majority of births occur outside marriage..." ("Out-of-Wedlock Births Rise Worldwide," Joseph Chamie, yaleglobal.yale.edu, March 16, 2017).

It's interesting, however, that in some 25 countries, "...including China, India and most countries in North Africa and Western and Southern Asia ...the proportion of births out of wedlock is low, typically less than 1 percent. **In those societies births outside of marriage carry strong social disapproval...**" (*ibid.*).

Conceiving children outside of marriage, and divorce, produce a cycle of poverty, as those who grow up in single parent homes are much more likely themselves to become welfare recipients and add to the number of illegitimate births (*Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?*, pp. 15-16; see also "Unmarried Birth Rates and Fatherless Households: A National Crisis," Larry Elder, dailysignal.com, October 16, 2020).

These statistics represent an ongoing moral, spiritual, economic and social calamity of the first order that affects the entire society. Between 1965 and 1994 *five trillion* dollars (not counting private assistance to the poor) had been spent on welfare in the United States (*Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?*, i). And since then, despite the welfare reform measures passed by Congress in the mid-nineties, welfare spending has continued to mushroom, and trillions more dollars have been

spent (*Means-Tested Welfare Spending: Past and Future Growth*, Robert E. Rector, heritage.org, 3-7-2001).

### **Worship God – Not Money**

Money should not be your God. God should be your God. When you are motivated by an inordinate desire for wealth, by greed or lust for material possessions you become a slave to these things. Many greedy, lustful and miserly people have become rich, but to their own hurt and destruction. God may allow such to prosper for a time, but the day of reckoning will come. "He who trusts in riches will fall" (Proverbs 11:28).

Trusting in riches, setting your heart on money or the things it can buy, blinds you to deeper and more lasting values that make life really worthwhile. For this reason, the Bible speaks of the "deceitfulness of riches" (Mark 4:18-19). As the parable of the sower and the seed shows, those consumed with material interests shut themselves out of the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:22). "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives to us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Realize that money, and everything of this world, is only temporary. "Riches are not forever" (Proverbs 27:24). But the kingdom of God is forever (Daniel 7:13-14; Luke 1:33; Revelation 11:15). "...do not worry, saying, 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear?' for after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteous-

ness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

More important than saving money, is treasuring your relationship with God, and putting that first in your life. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Is your heart really in God's kingdom first and foremost, or seeking to accumulate wealth in this world?

God is the provider of all things. He has the power to make you rich or poor according to his will. "The Lord makes poor and makes rich" (1 Samuel 2:7). When you worship God and put him first and he blesses you with riches, you avoid the sorrows of ill gotten riches. "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). But "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10).

God warns, "'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.' Then He spoke a parable to them saying: 'the ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "what shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" so he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which

you have provided?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God'" (Luke 12:15-21).

It's not unusual for unscrupulous, fraudulent religious leaders, politicians, business people, or others to take advantage of the poor or gullible to make themselves wealthy. Jesus warned us to beware of religious leaders "who devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:46-47). Today there continue to be not a few religious leaders who make illicit emotional appeals and misuse Scripture to persuade well meaning but deluded people to empty their bank accounts and retirement funds and even give up their homes, not caring that they may be left penniless and homeless. But the poor are not to be robbed and plundered, but treated fairly and justly by all (Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 22:16, 22-23; Jeremiah 22:3, 16-17; James 2:1-9). No less guilty are corrupt politicians who enrich themselves at public expense while feigning concern for the poor, and crooked business people who amass wealth through fraudulent business dealings (Leviticus 19:11).

A great sin of America has been lax enforcement of immigration and labor laws, which allows the exploitation and oppression of the poor among us, including illegal aliens, who are often subjected to substandard wages and working conditions, and sometimes literally enslaved, without recourse to justice. God commands, "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother" (Zechariah 7:10). These very sins were among those for which God sent divine punishment and scattered the ancient nations of Israel and Judah (Zechariah 7:14). And he will do so again unless we as individuals and as nations repent.

**It's More Blessed To Give Than To Receive**



The real meaning and pleasure your life will have will come not from what you get or acquire but from what you give to God and to others. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Godly money management should enhance your ability to give to others and in that way enrich your life and that of others.

You are commanded to "honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase" (Proverbs 3:9). As God is a giving God, so he wants us to learn to give as well (Matthew 5:42-48). That's one reason he requires tithing and the giving of offerings (Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 16:16-17; 26:9-15).

Jesus commended a poor widow who gave, not out of her abundance, but out of extreme poverty (Mark 12:41-44). The churches of Macedonia were also an example of generous giving

out of deep poverty to supply the needs of others (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). God takes notice of those who give liberally, and he is able to supply their needs (2 Corinthians 9:6-9). What counts most with God is not how much is given, but the attitude and spirit behind the gift. Giving should be done as privately as possible, out of a pure motive, never to be seen of others or to seek the praise of men (Matthew 6:1-4).

One of the main reasons we should labor is to "have something to give to him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). "God loves a cheerful giver" (1 Corinthians 9:7). If you cultivate a generous and giving spirit, using what you have wisely to benefit others, you can expect even greater blessings in the future. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11:25). "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will

be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

While many of these promises may be fulfilled in this age, depending on the circumstances, the major fulfillment is for the future, in God's Kingdom. "Give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21). Jesus Christ will bring with him the rewards stored in heaven when he returns to establish his Kingdom. "... behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12; cf. Revelation 11:15-18).

If you learn to share what you have with others, and give generously with a pure heart, expecting nothing in return, God will see that in the end you want for nothing. And you'll find a meaning and purpose in life that makes money seem relatively unimportant.



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).

In a previous article (Autumn-Winter 2022-2023) I addressed the question of why did God choose Israel? In this article, let's continue exploring this subject.

To review, we learned in the previous

article that the first humans God created rebelled against God, and would not obey his commandments. As human beings multiplied on the earth, most followed the path of rebellion, their sins multiplied, and finally God decided it was necessary to put an end to the unmitigated evil and violence that had engulfed the world. No-

ah was commissioned to proclaim a warning to mankind, which he did for possibly as much as a hundred-twenty years, but no one would listen, so God sent a flood on the earth, destroying all but eight human beings who had been alive at that time (Genesis 6:3-8, 18; 1 Peter 3:20).

But again, as human beings repopulated the earth, they joined in rebellion against God under an evil and powerful ruler called Nimrod in the Bible. Because of rebellion and subsequent evil the population of the earth had been destroyed by a flood. The rebellion continued after the flood, and became an organized system at Babylon. Consequently, God confused their tongues and scattered them abroad on the face of the earth.

Out of rebellious mankind, God eventually chose Abraham, and revealed himself to him. Abraham proved faithful and obedient to God's commandments. It was through Abraham and his descendants that God would work to redeem mankind. God's promises of favor and redemption were passed down through his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob, or Israel, who had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

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.

The Israelites had become enslaved in Egypt, but God intervened to free them. In the wilderness he entered into a covenant with them. He told them: "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"** (Exodus 19:5-6).

**They agreed to the terms of the covenant, and God** brought them to the land of Canaan, which he intended to give to them as an inheritance. The Canaanites, were to be driven out because of their wickedness, not because the children of Israel were righteous, because the Israelites had not been faithful to the covenant they had agreed to in the wilderness. They had repeatedly rebelled against God.

**"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"** (Deuteronomy 9:6).

When God gave the Israelites the land of Canaan, he intended that they would walk according to the covenant they had made with him, and so be an example to the other nations of the world. "He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, And they inherited the labor of the nations, **That they might observe His statutes And keep His laws.** Praise the Lord!" (Psalms 105:43-45).

However, as recorded in Deuteronomy 1 Moses rehearsed what had happened in the wilderness, as the people of Israel rebelled against God's commandments. (Deuteronomy 1:10-39):

The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you! How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints? Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them

heads over you. And you answered me and said, "The thing which you have told us to do is good." So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, "Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. **You shall not show partiality in judgment**; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it." And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. And I said to you, "You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged." And everyone of you came near to me and said, "Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come."

The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands

and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, "It is a good land which the Lord our God is giving us." Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; and you complained in your tents, and said, "Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, 'The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.'"

Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place." Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day. And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, "Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord."

The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, "Even you shall not go in there; Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it."

God addressed them through Moses as they were about to enter the promised land. "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen" (Deuteronomy 10:12-21).

Satan had deceived the whole world. The nations of the world were practicing idolatry, worshiping false gods, and committing things that were abominable in God's sight. Concerning the great Babylonish system of deception God's word says: "... by your sorcery all the nations were deceived" (Revelation 18:23). Behind this system of deception is the chief

adversary of God, Satan the devil. He is the instigator of deception and rebellion against God. Of him it's said that he "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

The people of Israel were to follow a separate path, **not like the path the other nations had followed**. They were specifically told **not to adopt the customs of heathen nations**, that is, nations which practice idolatry and walk in ways contrary to God's laws. "When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, **take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'** You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it**" (Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

The people of Israel were to be holy to God, **sanctified and separate from the world**. God had said to them: "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**" (Exodus 19:5-6).

The primary job of a priest of God is to teach his commandments, his way of life, and set an example of doing so. God told the priests through Moses not to imbibe in alcohol when they were on duty serving in the Tabernacle, "that you may teach the children of Israel **all the statutes which the Lord**



**has spoken to them by the hand of Moses"** (Leviticus 10:11).

The Israelites were instructed in settling disputes: "If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the Lord chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. **According to the sentence of the law** in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you." (Deuteronomy 17:8-11).

Note that judges were appointed in Israel, in addition to priests and Levites. But they were to **judge in accordance with the word of God**. God had told the people of Israel: "**You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances**, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep **My statutes and My judgments**, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 18:4-5).

We read in Isaiah: "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).

So the priests, the Levites, and the judges were to judge according to the principles of God's judgments and commandments. As a nation, the Israelite people were to be an example of

the righteousness and wisdom of God's laws. "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for **this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'**" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

King Jehoshaphat of Judah, we're told, "sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel." "Also in the third year of his reign [probably circa 869 B.C.] he sent his leaders, Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nathanel, and Michaiiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites: Shemaiah, Nathaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah--the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. So they taught in Judah, and had the **Book of the Law of the Lord** with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and **taught the people**. And the **fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah**, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and silver as tribute; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats" (II Chronicles 17:7-11). So the example of the Kingdom of Judah, under a king, judges and priests faithful to the true God, not only was a blessing to the people of Judah, but was an example that impressed the nations around them.

Ezra was a priest who led some of the people of Judah back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. From

his day forward he has been honored as one of the most influential of Jewish leaders. He is credited with helping to restore obedience to the Scripture in Jerusalem after the captivity. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel"(Ezra 7:10 ). In addition, he is credited with translating the paleo-Hebrew script of Scripture into the Aramaic "square script," used in Babylon and the Persian Empire, and re-establishing and organizing the scribal tradition for faithfully copying the Scriptures. Some credit him also with finalizing the canon of the Old Testament.

Ezra, the scribe and priest, assisted by Levites, taught the people of Judah from the Scriptures (Nehemiah 8:2-8, 13, 18).

According to the prophet Malachi, "For the lips of a priest should **keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth**; For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

Had the Israelite people been faithful to the covenant they could have been used to lead other nations to faith in and obedience to the true God. Unfortunately, there were few times in their history that they as a whole people were faithful and served as witnesses in that regard.

Nevertheless, through his working with Israel, the word of God was communicated to mankind, and preserved among the Israelite peoples. Paul wrote, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly **because to them were committed the oracles [words] of God"** (Romans 3:1-2).

Despite the faithlessness of the people as a whole, there were it seems

always some among the people of Israel who were faithful. At the time when the faithful were being persecuted and killed by the king and queen of Israel, Elijah thought that he was the only faithful person of Israel who remained. But God spoke to him and said, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18).

Besides priests, Levites, and judges, God appointed prophets from among the Israelites at various times to bring his message not only to the nations of Israel and Judah, but also to Gentile nations, as recorded in the book of Daniel. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all have messages specifically directed to leading Gentile nations. Jonah was sent to deliver a message to Nineveh, a leading city of the Assyrian Empire. Paul (who was known as Saul previously) was commissioned as "a chosen vessel Mine [Jesus] to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). And there are more examples.

Gentiles who were interested in serving God always had an opportunity to become proselytes, and have communion with God. Among the Jews at the time of the New Testament there were a sizable number of Gentiles among many nations who had become Jewish proselytes.

God had told the people of Israel as they came out of Egypt, "And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it" (Exodus 12:48). Through the prophet Isaiah God said, "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—Everyone who keeps from de-

filting the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:6-7).

God kept his promises concerning their descendants to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But God knew beforehand (as did Moses) that Israel as a carnal nation would not be faithful to the covenant, and he would have to deal with them as he had dealt with the Canaanites, and they would become an example in a negative way, by having God's wrath poured out upon them for their grievous sins (Deuteronomy 29-30; 31:16-21, 29).

The leaders and people of Israel and Judah had after having been recipients of God's blessings become so degenerate and sinful that their wickedness was as bad or worse than that of the Canaanites, and Sodom (1 Kings 21:25-26; Ezekiel 16:46-52; and see below).

"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, 'In Jerusalem I will put My name.' And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the

sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the Lord had said to David and to Solomon his son, 'In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not make the feet of Israel wander any more from the land which I gave their fathers--only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.' But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the Lord spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, 'Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.' Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord" (II Kings 21:1-16).

Because of the iniquity they had practiced, influenced by unfaithful leaders, God said to the people of Judah, "Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of it, his ears will tingle. Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of the innocents'" (Jeremiah 19:3-4).

Paul wrote, "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged. But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world?" (Romans 3:3-6, ESV).

God's rejection of Israel and Judah for their rebellion and sins is a lesson not only for them, but for all the nations of the earth. The wrath of God upon them is a testimony to his righteousness and justice.

But God chose Israel also to be a blessing to mankind. God told Abraham, "... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). It should be understood that the Israelite peoples, those descended from Jacob, include not just the Jews, now scattered among many nations, but also others descended from Jacob, such as many of the English speaking peoples, and others concentrated today largely in some areas of Western Europe. Through blessings poured out upon the Israelitish peoples in relatively recent times, many nations have been blessed. It is God who made possible, largely through the Israelitish nations, modern tech-

nological progress that has improved the lives of people all over the world. Many billions of dollars of famine relief, and other types of assistance have been given to various nations especially by Great Britain and the United States in their times of greatest prosperity.

But the greatest blessing is through another avenue. It was through the descendants of Abraham that the promise of the Messiah was to come. From there it was through the tribe of Judah and the house of David.

Jesus, the Messiah, was born and an angel appeared to shepherds in a field nearby, and said, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Jesus Christ, who was the second member of the Godhead, came in the flesh, having "emptied himself" (as several translations put it in Philippians 2:7) of his Divine glory, and lived an exemplary life, without sin, and suffered and died that all people might have an opportunity to be granted eternal life (1 Peter 2:21-24). "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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

Jesus said to the Jews of his day, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). The carnal peoples of Israel, including the Jewish nation, but not only them, had failed to set a righteous example for the world.

God has chosen another nation, a spiritual nation, to bear witness to the world. It is now the job of the Church

of God, consisting of individuals genuinely converted to godly faith, to set the example, and be teachers, pending the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The latter day physical descendants of Israel, which includes not only the Jewish nation and people, but also many in Great Britain and the United States, British descended peoples elsewhere, and some other peoples primarily in Western Europe, who have been the recipients of material blessings in the latter days unmatched in history. Yet, these nations have continued to rebel against God, and have become increasingly hostile to any semblance of obedience to God's commandments. For them, there is coming a time of tribulation. It's called the "great tribulation" and "the time of Jacob's trouble." "For then there will be **great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). "Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is **the time of Jacob's trouble**, But he shall be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:7).

After that period is over, Jesus Christ is going to return to the earth, to establish his rule over the earth on the throne of David. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

The people of Israel and Judah will be delivered out of a brutal captivity, and



restored to their homeland in Palestine. "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says

the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Then Israel will fulfill its destiny as a model nation for the rest of the world, and all nations will seek the God of Israel, who is the creator of all mankind. "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

"Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'" (Zechariah 8:22-23).

Through Israel, when they are converted, God will reach out to all nations. God ultimately chose Israel so that they and people of every nation might eventually enter into a saving relationship with God, and fulfill the destiny for which God created mankind, that is, to become sons of God in his eternal kingdom.

## Do You Know God?

It's said that "The Bible lies at the heart of Christian belief and practice," ("the Bible," [christianityinview.com](http://christianityinview.com)). If so, the Bible should be the authoritative source for doctrine concerning the Christian faith, should it not? Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

Unlike any other created kind, human beings were made for the purpose of having an intimate relationship with and knowledge of God. Human beings were made with the potential of being granted the gift of eternal life, God life, as additions to the God kind, as members of the Divine family (Revelation 21:7). William Barclay in his book *New Testament Words* in discussing eternal life remarks. "...the word *aiōnios* [eternal] is the word of eternity in contrast with time, of deity in contrast with humanity, and...therefore *eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*" (p. 37, italics in original; also see our article "Christ in You—the Hope of Glory," at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org)).

Scripture tells us that *we can* know and understand God; not totally, for we yet "see through a glass darkly." But we can know and understand those things he has revealed, and he has revealed quite a lot. "...let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me..." (Jeremiah 9:4). Jesus said, "...I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" (John 10:14). Knowing God goes hand-in-hand with having the gift of eternal life: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). To those called and chosen God has given His Spirit, "...that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." The hidden secrets of a future age "God has revealed...to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12, 10). Further, through the knowledge God reveals of himself through his word, it's possible for us to have an intimate personal fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

Presumably, most if not all who claim

to be Christians assume that they know God. Is there revealed in Scripture a test that can reveal whether you really know God or not? There is.

As we saw above, knowing God goes hand-in-hand with eternal life. And how can we know God, and know that we know God?

**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.** He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:1-6).

For related commentary, see our article "Were the Commandments 'Nailed to the Cross?'" available at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org).

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Visit [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org) to learn more about God's purpose and plan for mankind.

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