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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?”

The day Christ was speaking of here at Matthew 7:22 will be the judgment day. At John 12:48 Christ spoke of that day as “the last day.” The apostle Paul had the same day in mind when he was preaching to those at Athens, where he said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world. . .” (Acts 17:30, 31). But, notice, if you will, Christ said that on that day of the judgment, many, not a few, but many, will say to Me, that is, to Christ: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, have we not cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” But, in reply to their pleadings the Lord said, in the next verse, in Matthew 7:23, “And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” How about that?

Again, reader, please note: they were claiming to have had prophesied in the Lord's name; and had cast out demons in His name; and had done many wonders in His name! Were these wrong things? Were these lawlessness? If not, then why did the Lord say to them to “depart from Me you who practice lawlessness!”?

To understand this we need to go to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, where the apostle Paul was teaching about love. In 1 Cor. 13:8-10 the Holy Spirit inspired man of God wrote: "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

In the first century A.D., in the beginning of Christianity and the church, when the New Testament Scriptures were being written; the Lord had supernaturally empowered certain Christians in the church through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-22), to prophesy or speak His will as He had revealed to them for others; to speak in tongues or languages they themselves had not learnt, so that His gospel may reach to the vast majority of people. Likewise they were empowered to perform wonders or heal the sick miraculously. All of this supernatural knowledge or power was to last until that which is perfect has come, as we have read from 1 Cor. 13:8-10. But when the perfect did come, that is, the whole of the New Testament was written and God's word or will was-given to man in its complete form. The complete Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, then that which was in part, which included prophesying and casting out demons and wonders or miraculous healing, etc. was done away or the Lord simply took them away. Today we have God's "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). And the Lord want us to hear Him today and do what He has revealed for us In His "Book. (Matthew 7:21).

Once upon a time people were required to be circumcised, offer animal sacrifices, keep Sabbath, and to do a host of other things. God had required them of people then. They are written in the Bible. But simply because they are written in the Bible does not mean that we have to practice them today. But, if we do, then that becomes lawlessness in the eyes of God.

The Work Of Elders And Deacons

J.C. CHOATE

To be elders and deacons Christian men must be able to meet the qualifications laid down in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The local

congregation chooses two or more men to be their elders and two or more men to be their deacons, based on their ability to meet the qualifications as stated in the scriptures.

Elders and deacons are not chosen just to honor them or to give them recognition and power. Rather, they are chosen as *servants of the church*: to do a work, to render a service to the congregation, to give the much needed leadership that the members of the congregation need to do their work.

The work of the elders falls into these categories: As shepherds, they are responsible for seeing after the spiritual needs of the flock (members of the church). They must see that the truth is taught, protect the church from false teachers, consider benevolent needs that may arise among Christian families and in the community, and deal with the weak and the unfaithful. While doing all of these things, they must also keep their focus on their greatest responsibility: to create and carry out plans to spread the message of Christ to the lost. Deacons are to work closely with the elders, to see after the physical needs of the members, to give leadership to the various areas of work of the congregation, and to do other things that the elders may appoint them to do.

The elders, themselves, need to meet every week or two to discuss their work, to deal with problems and needs that arise, and to make plans and set goals for the future of the work. Without this business-like approach to their responsibilities, the congregation will suffer and instead of going forward to grow and to spread the Lord's cause, the work will decline over the years.

The elders should meet often with the deacons to discuss and pray together about the congregation, what it is doing, what it is not doing, and the needs that might currently exist. The deacons should discuss along with the elders the various things that they can do to promote the local work. There should be a well-developed program of involvement, with the elders, deacons, and the whole family of Christians, coordinating their concern and energies toward evangelizing the lost while exhorting and encouraging each other.

From time to time the elders and deacons should invite the men, and young men, to meet with them to discuss the work of the church and how all can be involved in that work.

WORK IN WHICH THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED

There is important work for ladies in the church to do. They can create opportunities to use their homes for hospitality. They can visit friends and share the Gospel with them, or go along with their husbands to visit families in the church or those outside the church who have shown interest in home studies.

Classes need to be conducted with emphasis on different age groups, and the women can be responsible for teaching the children, the young children, and younger and older ladies. Young men's classes or combined youth classes should be taught by an elder, deacon, or some other qualified brother, since there would be male Christians in those groups.

A personal work program should be conducted with visits (and telephone calls) made to weak members, to minister to the sick, and to visit those who have attended the meetings of the church, or who might be known to have some interest. Bible correspondence contacts and contacts made through other literature can be visited. Through letters and phone, these contacts need to be encouraged to follow-through on what they have learned. Gospel meetings should be arranged in their areas, among friends and family members, to the end of converting new people and establishing new congregations.

Bible classes should be regularly scheduled in homes on Sunday and Wednesday evenings or at other times when they can be arranged, so that there can be a neighborhood outreach through the homes of various Christians. Elders should keep before the church the realization that our purpose in the world is to be God's light and voice, and that every Christian must feel a responsibility to reach out to those around him.

Efforts should be made to properly use all of the literature that is available in different languages, to get it out to those who need its message. Mass media tools are important "weapons" in the hands of God's army, when elders properly train Christians in that way of thinking.

A financial report should be made monthly, or at least every two to three months. Those reports should state what the contributions were, week by week, for the period of time being covered. The expenses should also be listed, item by item, with the total expenses for each month. Then a balance should be

shown of what the church presently has on hand. Based on the amount being given each week, and the total expenses each month, along with a consciousness of the financial capability of the congregation to give more and thus to do more, a work plan and a budget should be made up of what the church expects to do during the coming year.

The elders and deacons should set a good example in all that they say and do, in order that they might keep the respect and confidence of the congregation. The members should love their leaders, show respect for them, and work with them to accomplish the Lord's will in the local setting.

Where elders and deacons are scripturally installed, they are doing their job well, and the members are working with them, the congregation will be pleasing to the Lord and it will do the work God has kept His people in the world to do.

Which Church Of Christ Is Not The Church Of Christ

FRANCIS DAVID

The world is full of all kinds of churches. There are all kinds of denominations and each has its own creed and doctrine. There is much religious confusion in the world. In this kind of confusion, we want to see how can we find the church of Christ, which is based on the Scriptures. The Bible talks about only one church which was built by Jesus Christ Himself (Matt.16:18), and he is the head and saviour of this church.(Col.1:18; Eph.1.22,23). All over the world there are hundreds of congregations of the church of Christ, but there are some which are actually not the churches of Christ based on the Scriptures. They might be having the name church of Christ but they are not actually the kind of new testament church which Bible talks about.

When you visit a congregation of the church of Christ, you will see the things which are being practiced and done there are totally based on the Bible. The new testament church speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. They call Bible things by Bible names. They only honor the word of God and shun all kinds of creed and doctrines of men. The church of

Christ does not have her own doctrine. Only the Bible or the new testament is our doctrine. Jesus condemned the human doctrines and creeds in Matt.15:9, He says: "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines and commandments of men."

If you happened to visit the church of Christ in your area and if you attend their worship service, you will see, they pray, sing, give and teach from the word, partake of the Lord's supper. This is the pattern of new testament worship. If you find any of these thing missing then that is not the right church of Christ that you have attended. There are some who do not partake the Lord's supper that is the remembering of Lord's death every week or Sunday. The Bible commands us to remember the Lord's death through Lord's supper(Acts 20:7; I Cr. 11:23-28). The Scripture based church of Christ does this every week.

If you visit a church of Christ and you see the singing is done with the instrumental or mechanical music then that is not the right church of Jesus Christ because we are commanded to sing and make melody in our hearts or minds and not on the instruments. (Eph.5:19, Col.3:16). Some try to justify this by giving the example of David and old testament but they need to understand that we are not living under old law but under the new law of Jesus Christ our Lord (Col.2:14). Mechanical music was introduced in the church or in the Christian worship by pope vitalianus. Jesus Christ and His new testament is our authority in the church and our Lord never gave authority to use instruments in the worship. If a church of Christ uses mechanical music in the worship then that is not the new testament based church.

The leaders of the church of Christ are not known by special names or titles such as Father, Reverend or Padri. In Matthew chapter 23 verse 9 Our Lord says: "Do not call anyone on earth your Father, for ONE is your Father, He who is in heaven. Religiously we have only God as our Father. What about Reverend or right reverend? Let us see What the Bible says about it. In psalm 111 verse 9 we read: "He sent redemption to His people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: HOLY and REVEREND is HIS name." Now, whose name is holy and reverend? Is he talking about any Church leader or God? He says God's name is Holy and Reverend. There is no clergy and laity in the church of Christ, which is based on the new testament pattern.

All the members of the church of Christ call themselves

Christian and they know that they did not join the church of Christ but they obeyed with heart and mind the doctrine of Christ (Rom.6:1-6). Friend, if you are not the member of the new testament church, we encourage you to investigate the true church of Christ and be a part of it. The church is the body of saved people who are being bought by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28). If you are willing to be a part of the church which Jesus built, we urge you to believe in Jesus, confess Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins and be baptized and the Lord will add you to this body, the church of Christ (Acts 2:47).

“Be Ye Reconciled to God”

CLEM THURMAN

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

Few words trip as lightly off the tongue, or bring such joy to the heart, as “reconciliation.” The definition of reconciliation is: “To harmonize, to bring again to friendship, to restore fellowship.” Reconciliation is more than just the theme of these eight verses in 2 Cor. 5. It is also the theme of the entire gospel of Christ.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, man was put out of the garden. He had broken fellowship with God because of his sin. That is what sin does for each of us: “Behold, Jehovah’s

hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2). As the same prophet writes, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

The need for reconciliation is universal, for, *"There is none righteous, no, not one . . . for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23). Therefore, all of us have become "separated from God" because of our sins. This sad plight of mankind is described by the apostle Paul, as he discussed the sinful Gentiles, "Ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12-13). And because of this condition, the early Christians raised the cry world-wide: "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).*

THE BASIS : "DEATH OF CHRIST"—5:14

"One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). A long time ago, God said most clearly, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). Those who are separated from God by their sins are "dead in sin" (Eph. 2:1,12). The progression that leads to spiritual death is shown in James 1:14-15, "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death." That principle does not change. That was true in Eden, it is true today: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). When one commits sin, the penalty for it is death.

Consider the wonderful grace of God! We have sinned and deserve to die, but God intervened on our behalf. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And for what reason did Jesus come into this world? "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). We, because of our sins, were under the penalty of death. But He paid our penalty!*

The cost of our reconciliation to God was high—the price was the death of God's own Son. *"For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death"* (Col. 1:19-22). When Jesus died on the cross, He made possible our reconciliation to God.

THE EFFECT : "A NEW CREATURE" - 5:17

"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). To be *"born again"* (John 3:3,5), or be *"a new creature,"* one must have a new will, or purpose. Jesus said, *"if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24). Jesus lived, and died, by that principle of self-denial. Just before His death on the cross, He prayed, *"Father, not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42).

Notice in our text why Christ died: *"He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again"* (2 Cor. 5:15). He died for us so that we would live for Him. And reconciliation with God demands that kind of obedience on our part. *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth"* (1 Pet. 1:22).

When one is reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10), he is then to: *"Put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him"* (Col. 3:9-10). This *"new creature"* is to have a new goal, a new purpose and a new direction in life, seeking *"the things which are above where Christ is"* (Col. 3:1). And the reason for that new goal is simple: *"For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God"* (Col. 3:3). This *"new man"* will seek God's will, not his own; he will live for the Lord, not for himself.

THE LOCATION : "IN CHRIST" - 5:18

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18). The Lord Jesus is the only access to the Father. He said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). Just as

all spiritual blessings are *"in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3); so reconciliation is also only in Him. Paul wrote, *"God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ... If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"* (Rom 5:8-11).

No one can be reconciled to God while rejecting His Son! The inspired apostle Paul wrote of Christ making peace between the Jews and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-15), and then he added: *"That he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby"* (Eph. 2:15-16). All mankind, of all races, is to be reconciled to God in Christ.

The inspired apostle wrote, *"For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"* (Rom. 5:10). Then he showed how we enter into Christ and into the benefits of His death: *"Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3-4). There is reconciliation! Because no one can be reconciled to God without being *"in Christ,"* we must be *"baptized into Christ . . . into his death."* That is why Jesus emphasized, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16).

THE RESULT : "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"—5:21

"Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). If we are in Christ, we are then *"the righteousness of God."* Not by our work, but His; not by our goodness, but His. *"Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"* (Titus 3:5). Jesus lived the perfect life, He *"knew no sin."* We read in Heb. 4:15 that Jesus was, *"Tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin."* If we were made to rely on our own righteousness, we all would be doomed: *"All our*

righteousness is as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). None of us perfectly obeys the commandments of God. We fall short, we sin. If we rely on our own works, we must die, for *"the wages of sin is death."* But because He died for us, we become *"the righteousness of God in Him."*

The Scripture says of Abraham, *"His faith was reckoned for righteousness"* (Rom. 4:5). In the same way, our faith, by the Lord's perfect life, is reckoned unto us for righteousness. Notice that Paul declared: *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses"* (2 Cor. 5:19). Because we are *"in Christ,"* we have His righteousness *"reckoned"* (or imputed, or accounted) to us. That is, we are declared by God to be righteous because we are *"in Christ,"* and He is righteous. We are not declared righteous because of who we are or what we do, but because we are in Christ. If we have been baptized into Christ and into His death, then we are *"dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6:11). Then, being reconciled to God in Christ, we become the *"righteousness of God in him."*

THE MEANS : "GOSPEL OF CHRIST"—5:20

"We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). God has ordained that the gospel is to be the means of making known His offer of reconciliation to all of mankind. *"Go ye into all the world; and preach the gospel to every creature,"* Jesus said in Mark 16:15. Assigning the reason for His death on the cross, Jesus told the apostles, *"That the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:46-47).

This *"word of reconciliation"* (v. 19) is to be our theme in preaching today. The gospel of Christ is still *"the power of God unto salvation."* Wherever, and whenever, the gospel is preached, reconciliation is the theme. When the apostle Peter told people to *"repent and be baptized"* (Acts 2:38), he was pleading with them to be reconciled to God. The Scripture tells us, *"For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God"* (1 Cor. 1:18). Timothy was told, *"Preach the word"* (2 Tim. 4:2). And that must be our concern

today. Let us "preach Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23) as we beg the lost: "Be ye reconciled to God."

Barriers to Heaven

JOHNNY RAMSEY

There are roadblocks and obstacles on the road to heaven that ensnare many people through the years. These barriers must be removed, or the golden street of Glory will be missed by millions of casual pilgrims who stumble along the way. Everyone talking about heaven will not see the gates of that eternal City. We need to be prepared as we struggle with the devious ways of the world and the pernicious doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). Satan has cleverly disguised his traps and pitfalls along the route and has even made error more appealing and sin more alluring to the weak and worldly folk who traverse the highway of life. The poet who penned the following was accurate, indeed:

Many a man with life out of tune,
 And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
 Much like an old violin.

We are extremely unwise when we allow the devil to use our lives as a launching pad for his chicanery: "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). We can only escape his fiery darts (Eph. 6:16) by a steadfast faith (1 Pet. 5:8-9). To be unaware of hell's fury and Satan's clever devices is to succumb to the sink holes and quicksand that gobbles us up in our journey through life. We shall never reach our desired destination of heaven, if we fail to avoid the schemes of our diabolical enemy.

When we are aware of, and prepared for, the barriers on the road to victory, we can overcome the tempter and press on to the hilltops of glory. Paul made it very clear that he longed to depart and be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). And so should we! One of the grandest songs of all tells of our longing for that beautiful home of the soul:

*And when thy face I see
 My ransomed soul shall be
Through all eternity ...
 Something for thee.*

Christ is lovingly, tenderly and graciously beckoning us to that supernal realm and it would be tragedy to allow obstacles erected by Satan to deter us from the pathway of holiness. What are the barriers to the heavenly home? The poet, Whittier, was accurate indeed in these penetrating words:

*Of all the sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been."*

A LACK OF PREPARATION

The five foolish virgins had the door forever closed to them into God's sublime presence because they were unprepared (Matt. 25:1-13). When the Lord comes suddenly, "as a thief in the night" (1 Thes. 5:2), it will be too late for those who delayed and overlooked the urgency of the day of salvation. Just as Israel waited and all hope was lost (Ezek. 19:5), so shall it be for millions. Zephaniah spoke of the day of impending doom as a moment of sorrow, gloom, darkness and hopelessness (Zeph. 2:15). And another prophet writes, "It is time to seek the Lord" (Hosea 10:12). Unless we keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21), we cannot know the joy that comes to those who "die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). Nonchalantly pursuing the broad way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:14) will take us down a long, crowded road that eventuates in eternal torment and despair.

OVERLOOKING DANGER SIGNALS

Just as there are warning signs on modern highways, so has God clearly marked problems we encounter in our pilgrimage toward Judgment Day. We are challenged to be on guard against evil companionships (1 Cor. 15:33), evil sensuality (1 John 2:15) and the dangers of false teaching (Col. 2:8-10). We must stop, look and listen to the grandeur of the great salvation as contrasted with the vanity of riches (Heb. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:17).

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
All its joys are but a name;
But His love abideth ever
Through the endless years, the same!

REFUSING TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

When we fail to go forward in the divine realm, we acknowledge that such exercise is unimportant to us and that

secular attainment is more precious to us. But the mandates of the Bible powerfully insist that we grow spiritually and press on to nobler heights and richer matters. It was not enough for steam engine trains to have plenty of water on board, the water had to be on fire if the proper destination was obtained. We, as God's elect, must have zeal and determination and proper emphasis, as well, if we are to reach heaven (Phil. 2:12-15).

Self-denial, ardent devotion and scriptural emphasis must be our credentials, if we would enter into heaven. Do we really mean it when we sing the old hymn?

*I want to scale the utmost height,
And catch a gleam of glory bright,
For faith has caught the heavenly sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.*

May every barrier to heaven be overwhelmed by our firm resolve and our loving obedience.

What We Learn from the New Testament Pictures of Baptism

STAFFORD NORTH

The New Testament makes many direct statements about the relationship between baptism and salvation for forgiveness of sins. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16); and Peter said, "Repent... and be baptized ... for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

In addition to such direct statements, however, the New Testament provides us with a number of pictures of baptism from which to learn the place God gave baptism in the salvation process. A look at these pictures can be very useful.

• **Acts 22:16.** In the account of his conversion in Damascus, Paul re-tells what Ananias, who received his commission directly from the Lord, said to him: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). Ananias pictures sin as dirt to be washed away, as one would cleanse the body. According to this picture, at what point do we cease to be dirty and become clean? At the point of baptism. Before baptism—dirty with sin; after baptism - clean from sin. To teach that sins were taken away before baptism

would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **Romans 6:3-4.** This scripture gives two pictures about baptism. The first says we are “baptized into Christ” (v. 3). Galatians 3:27 says the same. These passages picture baptism as the act which moves us into Christ. Of course, we must be in Christ because “in Christ” are all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). But in the picture, baptism moves us from outside to inside. Before baptism—out of Christ; after baptism—in Christ. To teach that God puts one into Christ before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

The second picture in Romans 6:3-4 is that of a burial and resurrection. First we are reminded that Christ died and was raised from the dead to a new life. Then we are told that our baptism is a re-enactment of these events in Christ’s life. We are baptized into His death and then, likewise, are raised to a new life. Before baptism—the old life; after baptism—the new life. To teach that one starts his new life in Christ before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **1 Corinthians 10:2.** In this passage, Paul provides a picture of baptism through a comparison with a famous Old Testament event. Speaking of the children of Israel as they fled Egypt, Paul says they “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” When the walls of the Red Sea were on either side of them and the cloud (of water) above them, they were surrounded by water. Prior to this point they were, in reality, still in bondage and not yet able to enjoy the spiritual blessings God had waiting for them. After this “baptism,” however, the passage says they could eat together of the spiritual food and spiritual drink provided by Christ. Before baptism—bondage and no blessings; after baptism—freedom and blessings. To teach that one receives spiritual blessings before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **1 Corinthians 12:13.** Paul provides another picture of baptism. Here he teaches we are all “baptized into one body.” There is one body, often described as the church, and we are baptized into that body. Before baptism—not in the body; after baptism—in the body. To teach that one is in the body before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **Galatians 3:27.** Paul provides another picture of baptism. “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”. What a beautiful way of saying we are to be like

Christ—we are to wear Him as a garment. But we qualify to wear Him at baptism. Before baptism—not wearing Christ; after baptism—wearing Him. To teach that one is wearing Christ before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **Colossians 2:11-12.** Paul pictures baptism as parallel with the circumcision of the Old Covenant. “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God.” Just as a Jewish male was circumcised to make him part of the covenant and just as something was cut away when that happened, even so we have an event to connect us with the covenant and to cut something away. That event is baptism. In baptism Christ places us into the new covenant and takes away our sinful or carnal nature. Before baptism—not in covenant with Christ and in the carnal nature; after baptism—in covenant with Christ and having a new nature. To teach that one is in a covenant relationship with Christ before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

• **1 Peter 3:21.** Peter gives us another picture of baptism in this passage. He says that just as Noah and his family were “saved through water” as it carried them from the old world of sin to a new world of righteousness, even so baptism “now saves you.” Our baptism in water transports us from an old world to a new world. Before baptism—in the old world of sin; after baptism—in the new world of righteousness. To teach that one is in the new world of righteousness before baptism would mean rejecting this Bible teaching.

These eight pictures are based on one fact: baptism is the point of demarcation, the point at which we leave the old and receive the new. Before baptism—dirty with sin; after baptism—clean from sin. Speculations on how God will treat those who reject baptism, never understood baptism, or never heard about baptism do not change what Scripture teaches. One may wish God will make some provision for those we love or admire who have never obeyed Christ in baptism, but such speculations must not affect what we teach people to do to be saved. God will judge. We must teach. And we must teach what God has revealed in His Word. There He tells how to be cleansed from sin, added to Christ, start the new life, have freedom and blessings in Christ, be in Christ’s

body, wear Christ, enter the covenant of Christ, and leave the old world and move to the new one.

If we teach what He says, we will teach that all these blessings are promised at the point of baptism and not before. The New Testament teaches this message by direct command and through its many pictures of baptism. We are saved by God's grace when our faith responds by obedience in baptism. To fail to teach this is to fail to teach God's message.

God's Indescribable Gift The Gift Predicted

The odds of all the messianic prophecies being accidentally fulfilled in one man are astronomical.

BY KENNY BARFIELD

Most of us would like to squeeze out a tiny drop of tomorrow and examine it in advance. But no matter how hard we try, our abilities fail us. Even with a sizable number of hints in place and educated men and women examining the evidence, no one put the pieces together to foresee the tragedies of Sept. 11,2001. Looking into the future and returning with correct information is so rare that most people just assume it cannot happen.

Old Testament predictions detailing the appearance of a future ruler are so amazing for that very reason. The portrait of the Messiah that emanates from the writings did not originate with a single artist-prophet. Instead, it surfaces gradually over thousands of years, progressively merging into a meticulous composite identifiable as a first-century Jewish preacher known as Jesus from the little-known Galilean community of Nazareth.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

God shared His first brushstroke with humanity after man's fall when He explained that Satan's treachery in the Garden of Eden would be overcome by the seed of the woman who would crush both Satan and his efforts to separate permanently God from His creation (Genesis 3:15).

Throughout the Old Testament period, God added detail after detail to the emerging picture. Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

Daniel and Zechariah all added details to the growing list. One prophet after another spoke of His coming until the last. Malachi summed up God's promises by declaring, "the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come" (3:1). Efforts to catalogue and number those predictions have now been completed by a number of Bible scholars.

After seven years of exhaustive research, the venerable and meticulous 19th century scholar Alfred Edersheim culled 456 references from the Old Testament that pointed out varied predictive details regarding the "Messiah" and His life. Although some scholars may disagree as to the precise numbers of predictions exist.

Moses traced the Messiah's lineage through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10-11). Micah announced that He would be born in the small Judean city of Bethlehem (5:2). Jeremiah tempered His predicted birth by coupling it with the death of other children (31:15). Isaiah declared that the coming ruler would be born of a virgin (7:14). He would suffer for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53), would not answer His accusers, and would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

Zechariah foretold that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (9:9) and would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (11:12). The silver would be thrown in the temple and eventually would be used to purchase a potter's field which would then be converted into a cemetery. David predicted the Messiah would die from crucifixion (Psalms 22:16). Isaiah added that thieves would be crucified nearby (53:12). Isaiah also added that the Messiah would intercede on behalf of His accusers. David said that people would "cast lots" over the right to His clothing (Psalm 22:18). Surprisingly, however, the writer of Psalms predicted that His bones would not be broken during the ordeal (34:20) although they would be "out of joint" (22:14). Zechariah added that the Messiah would be "pierced" (12:10).

The Messiah would be a descendant of David (2 Samuel 7:13; Psalm 89:4; Isaiah 9:7; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5) and would serve as both priest and king (Psalms 72:8; 110:1, 4). His ministry would impact the Gentile nations as well as Israel (Isaiah 49:6; 60:3).

THREE AREAS OF PROPHECIES

Three distinct areas of prophecies stand out. First, a number

of the predictions indicate the general time period of His birth. Daniel placed the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom during the days of the Roman kings (2:44). Moses recorded the blessings Jacob gave to his 12 sons and indicated that the Messiah would come to Palestine before Judah lost the right to rule (Genesis 49:10-11). That right was taken away circa A.D. 11 at a time when Jesus would have just appeared in the temple (Luke 2:41-49). So upset were the members of the Sanhedrin at their loss of sovereignty that they lamented, "Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come." The birth of Jesus fits the exact time frame laid out in the Scriptures.

Second, Old Testament writers foretold His ability to work miracles (Isaiah 32:3-4; 35:5-6). It is evident that the New Testament writers believed Jesus fulfilled such predictions. We are told that He cured leprosy (Matthew 8:2-4); gave sight to the blind (Mark 10:46-52); provided hearing for the deaf (Mark 7:31-37); exercised inexplicable control over the forces of nature (Matthew 8:23-27; 14:22-32; Luke 9:11-17); and even raised the dead (John 11). As a noted scholar observes, "The miracles of Jesus were the fulfillment of messianic prophecy" and were "central to the message of the Synoptic Gospels." Each time He used miraculous forces, He offered His credentials. They testified to the validity of His claims (Matthew 11:1-6; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:18-35).

Third, many Old Testament prophecies point forward to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. No portion of Scripture more majestically anticipates the New Testament storyline than Isaiah. He predicted that the coming "servant" would "act wisely" and be "highly exalted," but He would also be "disfigured," and His form would be "marred." He would be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." He would be "stricken by God" and "pierced" as a result of "our transgressions. Though "oppressed and afflicted," He would not speak in His own defense. He would then "be cut off from the land of the living" and "assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich." Then, after "the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

JESUS' FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Although modern interpretations try to blunt Isaiah's prophecy and attempt to apply it to the nation of Israel rather than to a single

Messiah, such interpretations deny 1,700 years of overwhelmingly consistent testimony. To the words of Isaiah a chorus of other predictions regarding the rejection of the Messiah can be added. A prominent but innocent sufferer pictured in Psalm 22, often understood to be the Messiah, laments His pain, finds His voice silenced in death, then joins in a celebration of praise: Zechariah 11-13 pictures a rejected and smitten shepherd.

Jesus certainly claimed to be the fulfillment of all the prophecies. When He began His ministry in Nazareth's synagogue. He angered His hometown's citizenry by quoting Isaiah and stating, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Later, He told Jewish authorities, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (John 5:46).

OVERWHELMING ODDS

A number of years ago, Peter W. Stoner, chairman of the mathematics and astronomy departments at Pasadena City College, along with Robert C. Newman, assistant professor of physics at Shelton College, attempted to visualize the odds that only eight of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah could have been accidentally fulfilled in a single individual. They determined the odds to be one chance in 10 to the 17th power (1 in 10,000,000,000,000,000).

Stoner explained the magnitude of the number: "Suppose that we take 10 to the 17th silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing . . . eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man."

Stoner then calculated the odds that 48, or approximately 10 percent, of the 450 prophecies could be fulfilled in one person by chance and found the odds to be one chance in 10 to the 157th power. He illustrated this by referring to an electron and noted that if one counted electrons at the rate of 250 per minute, it would take 190,000,000 years to count a line of them one inch long and it would require 190,000,000 years times 190,000,000 years times

190,000,000 years just to count a cubic inch. Stoner then explained that if one of those electrons was marked and an individual was asked to retrieve that single electron, the odds would be similar to one person fulfilling just 48 of the messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. He concluded that the biblical claim that Jesus is the Messiah is "proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world."

God's Indescribable Gift *The Gift Personified*

It seems unconventional that the Son of God would come to the earth in such a humble fashion, but the only adequate response to His coming is thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift.

BY JOHN GIPSON

The Bible does not designate the month or the day, but it is clear about the event. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

CHRIST IS BORN

Did heaven ever sound a more glorious note or an angel give more joyous news to a waiting world? It was the Word promised by the prophets, anticipated by the godly, and now finally heard in the fullness of God's own time. The Word has become flesh (John 1:1-5, 14)! Christ the Lord has been born.

GOOD TIDINGS

More than 2,000 years have passed since that day of days, but still the thrill remains as we hear afresh the words: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto

you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:8-14). How beautifully the story is told. With such dignity, restraint and majesty, we are persuaded that every word is true.

Is it not strange that when the prophetic day came, it was announced to shepherds? Shepherds! Not the wise, the noble, the rulers of state, or the religious authorities—but shepherds! We are often shocked that our ways are not God's ways. The highest truth was not announced in Rome, the capital city of the world, or Jerusalem, where God was worshiped, but in a field! Who would have thought it? Astounding! God chose a field in the middle of nowhere and made this extraordinary revelation to ordinary men performing an ordinary, but difficult, task.

Apparently the night was much like any other night. Everything was being done in routine fashion. The shepherds had been busy during the day finding grass and water in a dry and stony land. From time to time they had to retrieve a stray animal or minister to those sick or injured. Now they were watching and waiting. One never knows when he may be required to lay down his life for the sheep. There may be a lion ready to spring upon the flock, or perhaps one may see dust on the horizon indicating the galloping of Bedouin sheep-stealers. Normal dangers.

And then it happened. An angel appeared, and the heavens became bright with the glory of the Lord. The reaction of the shepherds does not surprise me. They were afraid! I would have been too. How could one ever anticipate or prepare for the coming of an angel or suddenly witnessing the Lord's glory? How reassuring it must have been when the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." All people? Yes! God loves the whole world.

And then the announcement the ages had waited for—the birth of Christ the Lord in the city of David. The prophecy of Micah was true! "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

A SAVIOUR

The Saviour of the world has been born! In times past God did great things in Egypt and declared, "For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour" (Isaiah 43:3), but now, through God's grace, He sends His Son into the world to save people from the bondage of sin.

Years later at Bethany, John the Baptizer will focus on Jesus as the world's Saviour by saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29). Then John will explain, "I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel". Even later, the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of Paul said, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7). What a glorious message! What a wonderful Saviour! It was the night of nights when the angel appeared and said, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Even the Samaritans basked under the blessing of the birth of Jesus as they confessed, "For we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42).

THE CHRIST

The message declares that the Saviour born is Christ (*Christos*, "anointed"—the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word we know as "Messiah"). The concept of anointing objects and persons is firmly rooted in the Old Testament with consecrating to service; thus prophets, priests and kings were anointed to signify holiness or separation unto God. It especially attracts my attention that the Savior fulfilled the all-encompassing role of prophet, priest and king, making Him truly the Christ!

A time came during the ministry of Jesus when men were divided in their opinions as to who He really was. Some people, according to Matthew 16, believed that He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked His disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

The angel announced that the baby born was Christ; Peter confessed it; Jesus acknowledged it before the high priest (Mark 14:61-62); John wrote his gospel "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31); and the early church preached it, as seen in the book of Acts: "God has made him both Lord and Christ And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." Thus this truth was told again and again.

THE LORD

The phrase, "Christ the Lord," occurs nowhere else in the New Testament except in the angel's announcement. "Lord" is a significant word having to do with power or authority. Although the term was often used as a matter of courtesy, Jesus assumed the title with its authority when He asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46).

After the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas used the word "Lord" in conjunction with the absolute title of deity by addressing Jesus as "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Peter reminds us that God made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and at the house of Cornelius Peter declares that Jesus Christ is Lord of all (10:36).

"Jesus Christ is Lord" became the glad confession of the early church, a confession that still leads to salvation today (Romans 10:9). When Jesus was born, the world had its Saviour, Christ and Lord! This truth was confirmed by a most remarkable sign: "You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Doesn't it seem strange to you that the glorious One should be born in such humble fashion? Unconventional, too, that it was announced to simple shepherds, yet affirmed by a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The only adequate response is: "Thanks be unto God for his inexpressible gift!"

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