

A black silhouette of a man in profile, facing left. He is holding a book in his left hand and pointing his right index finger upwards. The background is a solid yellow color.

Church on Sand

by Dr. D. Michael Hentrich

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All referenced passages of Scripture from the New International Version of the Holy Bible (licensed by Biblica, aka The International Bible Society).

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Introduction

In reality, the Christian faith is NOT built upon a foundation of sand, but one of solid, unmovable stone as you will read in the last chapter of this book. The Holy Bible is the mooring post and cornerstone of the Christian faith, of course along with and subordinately to Jesus himself.

The Bible is a relatively stable document, having undergone few major changes since the Protestant Reformation when protestants generally separated the Apocryphal writings from the Canon text. In terms of fine tuning the translation and renderings, the Bible remains a work in progress.

However, the doctrinal work of scholars and theologians is a more relative task and, like it or not, their doctrinal perspectives fluctuate with the social and cultural winds of time. What experts and theologians are considering and accommodating today could not be dreamed of a hundred years ago. What was on the front burner for theologians a hundred years ago was similarly off the table a century before that. Liberation Theology, women in the pulpit, homosexuality, and gender-neutrality are but a few contemporary examples.

The sobering fact is, while nearly every Christian today would swear to you that they base their faith on God's Word as found in the Holy Bible, in reality many doctrines have supplanted the text. They are told by trusted pastors, preachers, scholars and theologians what the Bible says and what it means.

That might be okay, except that these are the perspectives of imperfect people like the rest of us. In addition, these scholarly perspectives are in constant flux. Not only that, but some of the seemingly carved-in-stone doctrines and beliefs that people stand on today relate marginally with the actual content of the Bible. In fact, as you will see, some of these doctrines and beliefs literally contradict the Bible. Beyond all that, the experts and theologians don't even agree with one another on these ever-evolving "truths."

How do you feel about that? Hopefully, any believer would feel righteously indignant. After all, one's eternal life is at stake.

You may say, "*Who are YOU to evaluate age-old doctrines of the Christian faith?*" I assure you, I am no one special. If you were to believe my words alone, then you would be repeating the same mistaken pattern that I am shining a light on throughout this book. You definitely should NOT trust me or my word. You should go back and open your Bible and trust God's Word as you find it there.

Therefore, I am enclosing in these chapters an "exhaustive" list of Scripture passages to reveal to the reader the Biblical basis for what is being asserted. I am offering a sobering reminder that even

the experts of the faith should be questioned sometimes.

We will now take a journey through a sampling of 16 of these doctrines or beliefs and compare them to the Biblical narratives to reveal how they hold up to Scripture, or not. There are others, but we will limit this book to these. Better put your seatbelt on. I guarantee you; it won't be a comfortable ride.

1. The Trinitarian Godhead

Most of us are more than familiar with the concept of “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” This is the tenet that there are three persons in one God. It is called the Holy Trinity; or Trinitarianism. We assume this must be firmly rooted in Biblical Scripture. There are few Christians who have not been taught that this is unquestioned Biblical truth.

But, as shocking as it may be, this concept is *not* clearly rooted in Biblical Scripture at all. The closest resemblance to the trinitarian view can be found in the Great Commission: ***“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 28:19) In reality, there is literally no reference to Jesus as “God the Son” anywhere in the Bible. Earthshaking?

From the time of Jesus’ resurrection, the early Church disciples and Church fathers have wrestled with the question of who Jesus really was. Was he just a man? Was he literally God the creator? Was he the Son of God or was he God the Son? These and other perspectives were argued for centuries. The early Church

Councils attacked this question head-on and they democratically concluded that somehow God is one but there are three persons in this one God, namely God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. No one has figured out how this can actually be. It is purely and solidly a “doctrine.”

What is a “doctrine?” According to Merriam-Webster, it is:

“a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief; something that is taught.”

There are arguments to support this assertion based on several passages of Scripture from the New Testament. All of these arguments make assumptions about what is meant between the lines, drawing on concepts not explicitly stated. It is a noble effort to make sense out of the Word, but the question is, is this doctrine in sync with what the Word of God is saying to us? Let us see.

Jesus was a man. Few will argue with that. However, Jesus displayed qualities of Divinity, and he was Deified in the minds of a few of his followers such as Doubting Thomas. (Jn 20:28) The question is, is it for Jesus alone to exhibit Divinity because he is God the Son? Did God originally intend for *all* human beings (not only Jesus) to fully mature and exhibit qualities of Divinity like Jesus? Could or would a real human being in spiritual and heartistic “perfection” exhibit qualities of Divinity or does Jesus need to be

God incarnate to do that? All of the possibilities were not fully explored during the deliberations of the Church Fathers.

While there are a few passages of Scripture that we are all familiar with that can be interpreted to indicate that Jesus is God the Son, in fact the treatment of these passages can sometimes seem presumptuous. For example:

Jesus said, ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*** (Jn 14:9) This has been interpreted to mean that Jesus is saying he is literally God the Father in human form. But what does it really say? Let us see this statement for what it is, ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*** This could mean that Jesus is saying he is God if one is preconditioned or predisposed to interpret it that way. Taken at face value, it could simply mean that Jesus exudes the Divinity of God, namely God’s heart, character, personality and spirit. (Col 1:19; 2:9) In other words, Jesus could just as well be saying, *“I am a living expression of God.”*

In John 10:30, 38 Jesus said, ***“I and the Father are one... the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”*** (also Jn 14:9-11) We are told that Jesus is saying here that there is no distinction between God the Father and Jesus; they are literally and existentially one.

However, Jesus also said in a prayer to God, ***“...so that they may be one as we are one.”*** (Jn 17:11, 22) This means that the “oneness” of God the Father and Jesus is like the oneness that

Jesus wishes to see between and among us, his disciples. That is *not* what we have been taught to think. That would mean that Jesus is not literally God the Father but is distinct from him while also **“one”** with him, as we should be **“one”** with each another. It is a relational “oneness,” not a literal “oneness.”

There are other passages of Scripture that have been used or interpreted to support the idea that Jesus is the second person of the Holy Trinity, i.e., God the Son. For example, in Mk 10:18 Jesus says **“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.”** We have been taught to interpret this as saying that Jesus is good because he is God. But, the same passage can equally well be understood as Jesus simply admonishing the people not to call him good but rather reserve that descriptor for God the Father, alone. This meaning would serve to help Jesus remain respectable in the eyes of those who were accusing him of claiming to be God; something the Jews could never accept.

While Jesus emphasized that **“only God is good,”** he also showcased human **“perfection”** as a goal we must all reach. He concluded part of his famous Sermon on the Mount by admonishing us: **“You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”** (Mt 5:48) This would imply a qualitative oneness, rather than literal. Is this the oneness that we regular people can hope to have but for Jesus it is something different? Or,

is this the same kind of “oneness” that Jesus and God the Father enjoy? The oneness of Jesus and the Father would thereby be a qualitative oneness, or internal resonance of heart, mind and character rather than an existential oneness of being. Jesus is saying here that just as he is one with the Father, we must also be. It is not only for Jesus to be perfect in this sense, but for us also to become perfect.

And was Jesus born not just pure, but with this perfect nature? Not according to St. Paul. He said in Heb 2:10 ***“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.”*** Perhaps any fully matured or perfected son or daughter of God would be able to likewise say to their children, *“When you see me, you see the Father.”*

If Jesus is God the Son, then there would be no hope that we mortal fallen humans could ever become perfect like Jesus. Such a doctrine virtually undermines Jesus’ role as a model and mentor for us. A minister said to me one time, regarding Jesus’ statement about being perfect, *“Well, Jesus didn’t really mean that. Maybe he was kidding.”* That is how much such a doctrine can distort our faith and relationship with Jesus, and therefore our relationship with God.

John 8:58 says: ***“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered,***

"before Abraham was born, I am!" We are told that Jesus is saying here that he pre-existed Abraham. That may be the correct way to understand it. However, if Jesus pre-existed Abraham, it would have been in spirit only since we know he was born of Mary.

Alternately, Jesus may simply be expressing his position as primary and superior to Abraham, who was considered the Father of the Jewish faith. This would be the same as when John the Baptist said Jesus was ***"before me."*** (Jn 1:15) The expression had nothing to do with age or time sequence. It was about position and authority. Perhaps we have made God's Word too mystical. Maybe it has always been more common sensical and down-to-earth.

Paul said in 1Cor 8:6, ***"there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."*** If you focus on the last phrase of this verse, it can be taken that perhaps Jesus is God the Son. But the rest of this verse makes it clear that the ***"one God, the Father"*** is distinct from the ***"one Lord, Jesus Christ."*** Again, there is no inference in the text that they are the same existential being.

Col 1:19; 2:9 ***"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,"*** Here we find that the fullness of God lives in Jesus. How marvelous! Jesus embodies all of God's qualities,

virtues and heart. As you will read in the last chapter of this book, this is the rock-solid foundation of the Christian faith. But, to extend this one step further and declare that therefore Jesus is God the Son rather than the Son of God is doctrine, as you will see below.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians 2:5-6 ***“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;”*** We have been taught that this is a declaration that Jesus is God; God the Son rather than the Son of God. However, did God not create the original Adam and Eve ***“in his image and likeness?”*** And did not Paul also say that Jesus came as another Adam in 1Cor 15:45? And didn’t Jesus stress that we all ***“must be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect?”*** (Mt 5:48) Thus, reading into this verse of Scripture that Jesus is God is again taking the meaning too far and beyond the text.

Heb 1:2, 8 ***“he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe...But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;’”*** Would God appoint himself heir?

We read in 2Pet 1:1 ***“through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”*** Yet we have been taught to replace the ***“and”*** with ***“=”***. The text simply doesn’t say Jesus is God. It’s just not there. It actually affirms the distinction between the

Father and the Son.

Like the citations before it, 1Jn 2:23 says ***“No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*** Again, rather than blurring the Father and the Son together into one being, this affirms their distinction.

1Jn 5:20 reads, ***“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”*** Another tricky passage. If you read it carefully, Jesus is affirmed as the ***“Son of God”*** who has come so that we may know ***“him who is true.”*** Who is ***“him who is true?”*** It is God. The words ***“He is the true God and eternal life”*** are clearly referring not to Jesus but to ***“him who is true,”*** which this passage identifies as God.

If the above-cited passages of Scripture were all the relevant passages that could be found in the Bible, and reading them through the lenses of our doctrines, people might be convinced that Jesus is God the Son rather than the Son of God, and that Jesus must be one of three persons in the one living God. However, the passages cited above are only a small fraction of all the relevant passages in the Bible. The overwhelming weight of Scriptural evidence actually supports a very different view than the doctrine suggests. In fact, the evidence is heavily on the side of Jesus and God the Father

being distinct entities and strongly makes the case that Jesus is the Son of God rather than God the Son. Read carefully the following passages from God's Word...

Mt 24:36 ***“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”***

Here we read that there is something that God knows but which Jesus doesn't know. Adherents to the doctrine will tell you that God the Father somehow hid this information from God the Son. It is a classic example of how we sometimes bend over backwards to interpret God's Word to fit doctrine.

Mt 26:39 ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** Here Jesus is praying to his Father in heaven. They are obviously distinct entities. Jesus is the Son of God, pleading with God, his Father. Adherents to the doctrine that Jesus is God the Son will tell you that Jesus is praying to himself.

Mt 27:46 ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** Here again, if Jesus is God the Son, Jesus must be praying to himself and must have forsaken himself.

Mk 9:21 ***“Jesus asked the boy's father, ‘How long has he been like this?’”*** One is left to wonder why God the Son would not know this information. God should know everything about the boy unless Jesus is actually the resonant Son of God but distinct

from the Father.

Lk 23:46 ***“Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** Who is Jesus crying out to if he is God the Son? Is he again speaking to himself? This only makes sense if Jesus is actually the Son of God.

Jn 5:19 ***“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”*** They are distinct.

Jn 5:30 ***“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”*** Jesus seeks to please God who sent him.

Jn 14:16, 28-31 ***“And I will ask the Father...for the Father is greater than I... I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”*** Jesus said: ***“The Father is greater than I.”*** The adherents to doctrine will tell you that this must be because God the Son is now embodied in human form, so he is lesser than the invisible God the Father. Are they correct, or is this more doctrinal apologetics?

Jn 17:11, 21-23 ***“I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one,... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as***

we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Here we have the full text of the citation used above. It even more clearly drives home the point.

Acts 10:38, 40 *“because God was with him....but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.”* God was *“with him.”* God *“raised him.”* They must be clearly distinct entities.

Acts 17:31 *“...by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”* God *“appointed”* him. God *“raised”* him.

Rom 4:24 *“for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”*

Rom 8:11 *“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies”* Same as above.

1Cor 15:27-28 *“God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him,”* An interesting Scripture describing the relationship between God and his distinct Son.

2Cor 11:31 *“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus”*

Gal 1:1 *“by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised*

him from the dead”

Eph 1:20 *“he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,”* God seated Jesus next to him.

5:2 *“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* Jesus was an *“offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Phil 2:9 *“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,”* God *“exalted”* his Son.

Col 3:17 *“...do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”* Give thanks *“through”* Jesus *“to God.”*

1Tim 2:5 *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,”* Jesus is in the position of mediator, or bridge. One cannot mediate for oneself.

Heb 3:2 *“He was faithful to the one who appointed him”* God *“appointed”* him.

Heb 4:15 *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”* James said God cannot be tempted (Ja 1:13, cited below)

Heb 5:7-10 *“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he*

learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.” This Scripture passage is full of affirmations that Jesus is the Son of God and not God the Son.

Ja 1:13 *“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;”* As above, Jesus endured Satan’s temptations but did not succumb. Thus, he cannot be God the Son.

To pull this all together, while there are a few passages of Scripture in John which either stretch our understanding of the relationship between Jesus and God or stretch our understanding of what the writer of John was trying to convey, the overwhelming testimony of God’s Word in the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God in a man; the Son of God and the new Adam.

Everything in the Bible is true. But to reconcile all of these passages with the doctrine of the Trinity, or three persons in one God, would require overlooking far more contrary scriptures than those which could be interpreted to support it. We should filter out the doctrines and embrace God’s Word in the Bible. Our eternal life rests on the rock of Christ and the Word, not on doctrines.

2. God's *“in control”* of human affairs

How many times have you heard, *“Don't worry about anything. God's in control! After all, God must be in control. He made the whole universe. He's so powerful. How could he not be “in control?”* It's become a pretty common statement of faith, even a cliché. It is so comforting to know that God is in control of whatever troublesome circumstances are going on in our life. What it means to most of those who subscribe to this belief is something like this: *“My dog wouldn't have been run over by that truck yesterday if God didn't allow it to happen or make it happen. God's in control.”* We need not fret or even try to take responsibility for all the ugly things we hear about in the news. It brings our blood pressure down and lets us breathe again.

On the other hand, this statement of faith lights a fire of rage in the hearts of many atheists among us. They respond to such a statement by ranting about what a heartless and cruel God he must

be to be “*in control*” of such a corrupt and pain-ridden world. They say, “*Who needs a god like that, who is permitting or even orchestrating all the filth and sorrow that people of the world are wallowing in?*”

So, where does this belief come from? Is it in the Bible? A full review of the text reveals that it is NOT to be found in the Bible. If God were in any way, shape and form “*in control*” of human affairs, then the literally hundreds of expressions of God’s frustration and disappointment with man found in the Scriptures would have to be insincere and meaningless. No matter what wrong thing we may decide to do, God will not stop us. And likewise, even if we decide to do a good thing, he may not even help us. You would have to deny the entire storyline of the Bible to maintain that God is “*in control*” of human affairs.

Many people think prophesy in the Bible is evidence that God is “*in control*” of human affairs. But such prophetic proclamations of God have always been contingent upon human cooperation, faithfulness and obedience. God made covenants with his people, only to see them dashed to bits by their faithlessness and disobedience. He was repeatedly betrayed by those whom he promised great blessings to. He withheld the punishments he planned for those who repented of their backsliding.

God has clearly made the decision to NOT be “*in control*” of human affairs but rather to reserve for his children a portion of

responsibility to respond to him, one way or another. How God then relates to us depends upon our response to his calling. The message is clear. The Bible is consistent about this. There are no mistakes about it.

Where, then, does this belief that God is “*in control*” of human affairs come from? It can only be attributed to wishful thinking, stemming from a desire to lessen our personal responsibility before the living God.

Take a hard look at this belief. Certainly, founding your personal life of faith on God’s Word is important to you. Therefore, just be aware that this notion is nowhere to be found in the Word of God in the Bible.

3. God knows the future and it's even *predestined*

God has been defined and described in so many ways, from one end of the theoretical and philosophical spectrum to the other. In some religious traditions he is believed to have all the faults and weaknesses of mortal humans. In others he is seen as a ruthless, bloodthirsty tyrant. The list goes on and on.

The Judeo-Christian tradition also has many concepts as to who or what God is. One such concept is that God knows everything, past, present and future in detail. *“After all, he is God! He made the universe. He must be so powerful and omniscient that he can even know the future.”* All believers do not embrace this belief, but it is certainly broadly held. Where does this belief come from? Is it based on the Bible?

Again, we can find a few verses in Scripture which lend themselves to this kind of interpretation. For example, Jesus says in the Book of Matthew: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your*

Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Mt 10:29-30) This is often cited as evidence that God knows everything, including the future. However, a careful reading of this verse shows that there is actually no element of futuristic knowledge inferred here. God is simply described as being fully aware in the present moment.

In the book of Mark, Jesus says ***“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*** (Mk 14:21) This is also seen as evidence that God knows everything, including the future. However, a careful review of what Jesus is referring to as ***“written about him”*** reveals another important aspect of this story. The prophet Isaiah wrote in his 53rd chapter that the coming Lord would walk the way of rejection and suffering. He will be ***“pierced, crushed, bruised, and by his wounds we are healed, etc.”*** It seems clear enough.

However, Isaiah also wrote about the coming Lord in chapters 9, 11 and 60. Here he speaks of a glorious reception by the chosen people and the literal kingship of the Messiah. He talks of everlasting peace in Israel and a kingdom that will have no end - God’s long-awaited kingdom on earth. These passages were also ***“written about him.”*** However, these glorious, victorious achievements were not realized during Jesus’ lifetime 2000 years ago, if we are honest with ourselves.

The adherents to doctrine tell us that the prophecies of Isaiah's chapters 9, 11 and 60 are referring to the Lord's return in the distant future and not to his life 2000 years ago. But, it would be far more consistent with the historical record of the Bible to see these dual prophecies as a simple recognition and reminder that God has given man free will to choose and, based on man's dismal past record, God knew that the coming Lord will either be received or rejected. Isaiah is simply painting the picture for us of what the outcome will be of either choice we make; to have faith in and accept his Son, or to reject him. This is exactly what Jesus described in his parable of the tenants. (Mt 21:33-43)

Another verse that is usually cited as evidence that God knows the future is Rev 13:8. This verse has been rendered to say that Jesus was "***slain from the creation of the world.***" This would mean that God planned from the beginning that Jesus would be rejected and killed by faithless people. It was "*the plan.*" Case closed.

However, in fact there has long been serious controversy among scholars as to the rendering of this passage. When compared to Rev 17:8, the controversy becomes apparent. Rev 17:8 has the same wording about "***the creation of the world***" but here this phrase is attached to the "***book of life***" rather than the "***lamb who was slain.***" Thus, many scholars believe that Rev 13:8 should read like Rev 17:8: "***All inhabitants of the earth will***

worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life from the creation of the world, the Lamb who was slain.” This alternate rendering is footnoted in the NIV Bible and expressed directly in the WEB, and others. It is not a new and obscure controversy by a few radical theologians. There is a serious, ongoing debate on this.

The point is, we may have been pinning our wishful thinking on incorrect translations of scriptures which, if corrected, would bring greater consistency to the entire Word of God. Without the easily misunderstood citations above to point to, those who think that God knows the future in detail have very little to stand on in God's Word.

On the contrary, we also find Jesus expressing an impassioned and remorseful statement in Lk 13:34: *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”* This reveals a disappointed and frustrated Jesus. He did not know nor expect that the people would not respond to him. Either that, or his expression is not sincere.

God's word came to the prophet Samuel. He said, *“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.”* Here God expresses deep disappointment in Saul, saying that he did not live

up to his expectations. Hello!

And what about the Fall of man in general? Few people think about the Fall of the first human ancestors these days. The focal point of Christian faith is Jesus and his answer to sin. But the way we look at the Fall sets the stage for how we look at Jesus and our salvation and everything else. If we start with a false premise, it is unlikely that we will arrive at a correct conclusion.

Sin came into the world. The question is, did God know it was going to happen that way from the beginning? Did God plan it that way? If God did not know ahead of time and even plan it that way, then that would mean that Jesus came as a remedial necessity rather than a predestined part of God's original plan. Fortunately, all the evidence required to answer this question can be found in the first few pages of the Book of Genesis.

God created the world and the Bible says that originally, ***“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”*** (Gen 1:31) That means there was no evil, devil, Satan, or sin in all of God's creation. These only existed conceptually in the mind of God. (Gen 3:5)

Fast forward to Genesis Chapter 3. God's first children sin and He confronts them about it. He interrogates them as to what they have done, concluding that they have disobeyed his commandment not to ***“eat of the fruit.”*** What is God's reaction? God is **furious!** He is disappointed and so upset that he kicks

them out of the garden he prepared for them. Not only that, but he curses both of them and all their descendants to suffer as a consequence of their sin, plus the Serpent. And that is not the end of it. Far from it. We read in Genesis 6:6 that God ***“regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”*** The King James Version is even more expressive: ***“it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”***

Did God just dramatize this scene to show us that sin is a bad thing? Was he just injecting a lot of emotion to emphasize it to us, having known and even planned it all along? After all, what if they didn't fall? Jesus would not have to come and save us! Was God's human paradise on earth his original plan, or a miserable, painful history of human sin and salvation? To take the doctrinal route and insist on the latter makes the story of Adam and Eve insincere, inconsistent and contradictory.

A God who has decided to give his children literal free will and choice, even to disappoint him, is the only kind of God that makes sense as described by the Biblical narratives from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible could veritably be retitled *The Book of God's Unending Frustrations with Man*. It is filled with hundreds of instances where God expressed disappointment, sorrow and frustration over man's repeated lack of faith, obedience and commitment to his words

and directions. Truly man is a wild card.

God tells us what will happen “*IF*” we obey him or not. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are but a couple of great examples. The big two-letter word “*IF*” is found throughout the Bible, but amazingly we have still been taught to think that God already knows what we will do, choose or decide in detail.

If this doctrine were true, it would make our free will an illusion since everything is already somehow known or knowable ahead of time. Everything breaks down with this idea. God becomes heartless and cruel and the Bible becomes an insincere and useless book. Our lives would become a boring game for a God who already knows every move and outcome. Hello! It is simply not Scriptural. It’s simply not what the Bible is conveying and saying to us. But some adherents to doctrine will say, “*Yes God really did give each one of us free will and a choice in all matters, but he knows every choice every person will make in their lives.*”

Your future is even *predestined*

Not only do many believe that God knows everything about the future, but many also believe that everything in our earthly life and also our eternal destiny were already predestined before we were born. It is also called “Determinism.”

For many, that means no matter how carefully and virtuously

you may live your life, if God has already predestined that you are going to hell when you die, that is where you will go. And on the flip side, no matter how selfishly, hurtfully and criminally you might live your life, if God has already predestined that you are going to heaven when you die, that is where you will go.

As you might expect, there are some passages of Scripture which have been interpreted to suggest this to be true. For example:

Prov 16:4 *“The LORD works out everything to its proper end— even the wicked for a day of disaster.”*

Is 46:11 *“... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.”*

Jer 1:5 *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”*

Rom 8:29-30 *“...for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”*

Rom 9:11-12 *“Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’”*

Rom 9:15-16 *“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”*

Rom 9:21 *“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?”*

Eph 1:4 *“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*

As you might have noticed, several of these passages came from one section of St. Paul's letter to the Romans. Keep that in mind as we peruse over 75 additional passages of Scripture below, from Genesis to James, which clearly reveal to us that God *DOES NOT* in fact predestine our earthly life or our destiny. In fact, he clearly *REFUSES* to micro-manage our lives or decide our future. The following passages make it clear that the consequences of our decisions and actions are solely based on our own choices and not on God's predestined will.

Gen 2:17 *“but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”* God forbade them but did not control their decision nor actions.

Gen 3:17 *“To Adam he said, **‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.’**”* God cursed Adam because he chose to listen to his wife instead of God.

Gen 6:6 *“**The LORD regretted** that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”* God regretted his decision! He was deeply disappointed in how things turned out.

Gen 22:16-18 *“...**because you have done this** and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, **because you have obeyed me.**”*

Ex 32:14 *“Then **the LORD relented** and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”* God changed his mind because of Moses plea to him.

Ex 33:17 *“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, **because I am pleased with you** and I know you by name.’”* God’s actions were contingent upon Moses’.

Ex 34:12 *“**Be careful** not to make a treaty with those who live*

in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you.” God is warning them, not predestining them.

Lev 26:3 ***“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...”*** God promises blessing to those who follow and obey. The choice is theirs. Verse 15 states that lack of obedience will bring curses galore.

Num 11:19-20 ***“You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’”*** Consequences for complaining and rejecting God.

Num 14:43 ***“Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.”***

Num 20:12 ***“But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”***

Num 20:24 ***“Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah.”***

Deut 7:12 ***“If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors.”*** The huge two-

letter word “**IF**”.

Deut 8:20 *“Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.”*

Deut 11:13 *“So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—...”* The huge two-letter word “**IF**” again.

Deut 28:1-2, 15 *“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth...However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:...”*

The choice is ours.

Deut 30:19 *“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”* God says “*choose.*” He is not predestining. To predestine would effectively make God the author of all the suffering in the world (it is his script) and also make him responsible for all those who end up in eternal hell. This would be totally inconsistent with the loving heavenly Father whom Jesus revealed to us. The parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son would be meaningless and irrelevant.

Deut 32:50-51 *“There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites.”*

Josh 14:9 *“So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.’”*

Jud 2:20-21 *“Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, ‘Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.’”*

1Sam 13:14 *“But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.”*

1Sam 15:11, 23 *“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions’...Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”* God REGRETS again. That means

he did not know or expect that Saul would be such a bad king. God was disappointed again.

1 Sam 28:18 ***"Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today."***

1Ki 3:11-12 ***"So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked..."*** God is in an object role to man's actions and choices.

1Ki 13:21-22 ***"This is what the LORD says: 'You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your ancestors.'" Our choices have consequences.***

1Ki 20:36, 42 ***"So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him...He said to the king, 'This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'"***

2Ki 1:16 ***"He told the king, 'This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you***

have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!”

2Ki 10:30 *“The LORD said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’”*

2Ki 19:28 *“Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.”*

1Chr 15:13 *“It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us.”*

1Chr 22:8 *“But this word of the LORD came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.”*

2Chr 16:7-8 *“At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: ‘Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them”*

into your hand.”

2Chr 20:37 ***“Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made.”***

2Chr 21:12-15 ***“You have not followed the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah. But you have followed the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did. You have also murdered your own brothers, members of your own family, men who were better than you. So now the LORD is about to strike your people, your sons, your wives and everything that is yours, with a heavy blow. You yourself will be very ill with a lingering disease of the bowels, until the disease causes your bowels to come out.”***

2Chr 24:20 ***“This is what God says: ‘Why do you disobey the LORD’s commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’”***

2Chr 25:16 ***“I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.”***

Pss 91:9-10 ***“If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.”***

Is 1:19-20 ***“If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be***

devoured by the sword.’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Is 28:16 *“So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.’”*

Is 37:29 *“Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.”*

Is 65:12 *“I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will fall in the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.”*

Jer 7:13-15 *“While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.”*

Jer 13:25 *“‘This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.’”*

Jer 16:11-13 *“then say to them, ‘It is because your ancestors forsook me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. But you have behaved more wickedly than your ancestors. See how all of you are following the stubbornness of your evil hearts instead of obeying me. So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’”*

Jer 18:8-10 *“and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”* Again, God’s actions are contingent upon man’s decisions and deeds; and he will change his mind based on man’s choices.

Jer 23:38-40 *“Although you claim, ‘This is a message from the LORD,’ this is what the LORD says: You used the words, ‘This is a message from the LORD,’ even though I told you that you must not claim, ‘This is a message from the LORD.’ Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your ancestors. I will bring on you everlasting disgrace—everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”*

Jer 25:8-10 “Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.’”

Jer 28:16 “Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’”

Jer 29:18-19 “I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse and an object of horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them. For they have not listened to my words,’ declares the LORD, ‘words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either,’ declares the LORD.”

Jer 35:18-19 “You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jehonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.’ Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Jehonadab son of

Rekab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me.”

Jer 39:18 *“I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.”*

Jer 40:3 *“And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him.”*

Jer 44:23 *“Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see.”*

Jer 50:24 *“I set a trap for you, Babylon, and you were caught before you knew it; you were found and captured because you opposed the LORD.”*

Ezek 5:7-8, 11 *“You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations... Therefore as surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will shave you; I will not look on you with pity or spare you.’”*

Ezek 13:8, 22-23 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign LORD...Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.’”*

Ezek 16:43 *“Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?”*

Ezek 21:24 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do—because you have done this, you will be taken captive.’”*

Ezek 22:19-20 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem. As silver, copper, iron, lead and tin are gathered into a furnace to be melted with a fiery blast, so will I gather you in my anger and my wrath and put you inside the city and melt you.’”*

Ezek 23:28-30, 35 *“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I am about to deliver you into the hands of those you hate, to those you turned away from in disgust. They will deal with you in hatred and take away everything you have worked for. They will leave you stark naked, and the shame of your prostitution will be exposed. Your lewdness and promiscuity have brought this on you, because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols’... Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Since you have forgotten me and turned your back on me, you must bear the consequences of your lewdness and prostitution.”*

Ezek 25:6-7 *“...Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet, rejoicing with all the malice of your heart against the land of Israel, therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and give you as plunder to the nations. I will wipe you out from among the nations and exterminate you from the countries. I will destroy you, and you will know that I am the LORD.”*

Ezek 28:6-7 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god, I am going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations; they will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor.”*

Ezek 29:8-9 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD*

says: *‘I will bring a sword against you and kill both man and beast. Egypt will become a desolate wasteland. Then they will know that I am the LORD. Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine; I made it,...’*”

Ezek 35:5-6 *“Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, therefore as surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.’”*

Hos 4:6 *“my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.”*

Amos 5:14-15 *“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”* The choice is man’s. God does not predestine it.

Jonah 3:10 *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”* God changed his mind based on man’s decisions and actions.

Mal 2:2 *“If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to*

honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me."

Mal 4:6 *"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."*

Mt 7:7-8 *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."* The ball is in our court.

Mk 5:34 *"He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you...'"*

Mk 8:38 *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

Lk 11:10 *"For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

Lk 19:17 *"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'"*

Lk 19:44 *"They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming*

to you.”

Jn 3:16 ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** It remains our choice to believe. God does not interfere with that choice.

Jn 16:27 ***“No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”***

Ja 5:15 ***“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”*** The choice to offer the prayer is ours.

We believe everything in the Bible to be true. If that is true, how shall we reconcile the first few passages of Scripture cited above, which are often interpreted to show that God predestines everything, with the 75 others that followed? If we review the first group of passages carefully, especially St. Paul’s words, we see that the writers were emphasizing God’s power and authority without balancing this out with mention of man’s portion of responsibility. Even though it is God’s responsibility to call us, predestine us, justify us and glorify us, if we do not *respond* to the call, or fail in our calling, the outcome will be greatly affected and we will not fulfill our predestined calling, we will not be justified, and we will not be glorified. Paul simply did not mention man’s obvious role in the process.

The doctrine of predestination or determinism is alive and well in the minds and hearts of many believers. This doctrine again serves to help us lessen personal responsibility for our lives by hiding in the shadows of God's perceived total micro-management and judgement over our earthly lives and eternal destiny. This can critically undermine our relationship with the living God on both personal, social, political and collective levels.

All of this seems to be another case of man's wishful thinking rather than a truth based on God's Word.

4. The Ever-Virgin Mary

Mary must have been more than a special woman; she must have been an *incredibly* special woman to be chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus. There is no question that young Mary was a virgin in the contemporary definition of the word. Neither is there any question that this young woman ***“conceived and gave birth to a son and called his name Jesus.”*** (Lk 1:31)

We begin with the premise that Mary conceived in her womb not in any normal way but rather was *made pregnant* by the Holy Spirit. A review of the relevant Scriptures reveals that Joseph had a dream in which an angel told him, ***“what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 1:20) Matthew said, ***“she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 1:18) Also, the angel Gabriel explained to Mary that, ***“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”*** (Lk 1:35)

As for these revelations and messages, a careful reading again of what Gabriel said to Mary and what an angel said to Joseph in his dream, begs the question: Do these texts actually say that Mary will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit? In the mind of this writer,

they do not. However, we are addressing the question of Mary being “*ever-virgin*.” Therefore, for the sake of this discussion we will affirm that Mary did conceive supernaturally, by the Holy Spirit and not by the vehicle of any man. Upon this we can proceed with Mary still being a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

However, the waters seem to get muddied right away. As we begin our focus on the “*ever-virgin*” question, a revealing statement about the subsequent marital relationship between Mary and Joseph is found in Mt 1:25: “***...he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son.***” The claim of “*ever-virgin*” would preclude the possibility that Joseph *ever* “***consummated***” their marriage. Of course, doctrinal adherents categorically deny that Joseph *ever* consummated their marriage. “*It’s impossible. Mary is ‘ever-virgin.’*” Case closed.

However similarly, in Luke 2:7 we find this statement: “***...she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.***” Why would this Scripture passage say “***firstborn***” if there were no “*other-born?*” It would make no sense without some “*other-born.*” You might think this is taking scripture out of context. However, as those who have carefully read the Scriptures know, it is not the case.

We also find numerous references in the Bible to Jesus’ brothers and sisters, and even by name. Mark recounted that *Mary and her sons* went to a house where Jesus was causing controversy and sought to bring him home. (Mk 3:31-32) It is also recorded that

Jesus' disbelieving brothers once sought to set Jesus up to be killed. (Jn 7:3-5, 10) The Book of Acts tells that Mary and *Jesus' brothers* joined the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion to pray together for him. (Acts 1:14) The book of Matthew names each of *Jesus' four brothers (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas)*, and refers also to his "sisters." (Mt. 13:55-56) Finally, it is believed by many, if not most scholars, that the Book of James was written by the actual brother of Jesus.

Those adhering to this doctrine argue that these alleged "*brothers*" and "*sisters*" can't possibly be actual blood relatives of Jesus because Mary is "*ever-virgin,*" by definition. They claim they must either be children of Joseph by a previous marriage (stepbrothers and stepsisters of Jesus) or maybe they were actually just "cousins" and were called "*brothers*" and "*sisters*" because there is not a singular word in Aramaic or Hebrew for "cousins" as we have in English.

First of all, if Joseph had been previously married and these were Jesus' "stepbrothers and stepsisters" then the Gospel writers would be compelled to say something about this previous marriage. If Joseph's alleged previous wife had died, that would be one thing, but if he simply divorced her, except for adultery, there would be a huge problem. Note Matthew 19:9 where Jesus is quoted as saying: "***I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.***" The

Gospel writers would not have left such a huge question unaddressed. They would have said something to clear the air about such a sensitive situation.

Secondly, any Semitic person will tell you that no one using the Aramaic or Hebrew languages, even 2000 years ago, would refer to a cousin as a “*brother*” or “*sister*.”

We have explained that doctrine dictates that Mary was not only a virgin before conceiving Jesus and even after birthing Jesus, but she remains a virgin today. In reality, there is absolutely no Biblical basis nor evidence for this whatsoever. It is simply and purely the juxtaposition of doctrinal wishful thinking over actual Biblical text for the purpose of making the pure and incredibly blessed mother of the Savior of the world even more larger-than-life, far beyond human; a true super-woman.

Are we basing our faith on God’s Word yet? Maybe not in terms of this age-old doctrine of faith.

5. The humble birth of Jesus

There is no question that the circumstances of Jesus' birth in a manger are humbling, to say the least. After all, this is the long-awaited Messiah, king of kings and lord of lords. The traditional view of this is that of a glorified and quaint wooden structure with fresh hay and gentle sheep witnessing the event. This depiction and interpretation of the story unfortunately has nothing to do with the Bible record. In fact, as you will see, the circumstances of Jesus' birth should have been considered shocking and shameful rather than humble and glorious.

The scene opens when Mary and Joseph are on their way to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was Joseph's home town. (Lk 2:3-4) That means he grew up there. His parents lived there, his grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and all those he grew up with. Historians say it was at that time a town of about 600 homes; cozy enough such that everyone knew everyone or was at least aware of everyone. Joseph must have known many of the families in Bethlehem, or they knew him.

Mary is pregnant and needing a place to deliver her baby Jesus. Already this is very curious. Why? Where were family and friends? What Mary really needed was a midwife and a few square feet inside, out of the weather, where she could give birth to Jesus. The small and intimate home town of Joseph was full of potential midwives who could help Mary. The Bible narrative simply says: “...*there was no guest room available for them.*” (Lk 2:7) Hello! Something is seriously wrong with this picture.

What is NOT being said here is screaming at us. Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph were married. The baby was not Joseph's. Such a pregnant, unmarried woman should be stoned to death under the Mosaic law. There are many unanswered questions here. Did someone explain this whole thing to Joseph's parents and family? How might they receive the angel's message that what is conceived in Mary's womb is “*of the Holy Spirit?*” Do you think it was Mary who told them that her fiancé was not really the father? Joseph took Mary for his wife, but is there any record of a festive wedding ceremony to celebrate that event, like the wedding at Cana which Mary helped her friend with later on?

What the text is saying between the lines is that no one would open their door to Mary and Joseph. Not only that, but why would this young couple sneak off to a remote pasture to give birth to baby Jesus? A manger is a place where animals are fed and watered with a hollowed-out log and some hay. It is a most

unsanitary, filthy place soaked with animal poop and pee. Perhaps Mary and Joseph did not feel safe to have the baby in town, perhaps behind someone's shop or home since no one would help them or let them in. In fact, they were hiding where no one would find them to protect Mary and her baby. These were the painful but real circumstances of the birth of the savior of the world.

The circumstances around Jesus' humble birth are not a doctrine of faith; a tenet necessary for salvation. But, they are a prime example of what has been done with the Bible narratives. Are we building our faith on the Bible? Far from it in this case. How much our faith has been influenced and shaped by interpretations which often have little if anything to do with God's Word as it has been given to us in the Bible.

6. Jesus was born with the sole purpose of being crucified

If there is one universal doctrine that is preached throughout Christendom, it is that Jesus came to die on the cross. It is so fundamental of a tenet that if you fail to believe it, you could be excommunicated from some churches. There must be ample Scriptural evidence upon which to base this. And, there is. For example:

Is 53:3-12 *“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have

gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Mt 16:21-23 *“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the*

teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’”

Mt 20:25-28 “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

Mt 26:53-56 “‘Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’ In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”

Mk 10:33-34 “‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests

and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

Mk 14:49 *“Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”*

Lk 9:22 *“And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’”*

Lk 17:25 *“But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*

Lk 18:31-33 *“Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.’”*

Lk 22:37 *“It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”*

Lk 24:25-26, 46 *“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did*

not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'...*He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...'*”

Jn 17:4-5 “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Acts 2:23 “This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Acts 17:3 “...explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,’ he said.”

Curiously enough, however, there also exists in the Bible a much greater abundance of evidence telling us that Jesus DID NOT come with the sole purpose being to die on the cross for our sins. Don't worry! That would not mean that there would be no salvation for us sinners. Refer to chapters 9 and 11 for more perspective on that. But let us consider some of the abundant evidence in God's Word that indicates another intention for Jesus' life 2000 years ago. For example:

Is 2:4 ***“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*** How wonderful. This is what God wants, but doctrine says that this could not have happened 2000 years ago because Jesus had to be rejected and die for our sins.

Is 9:6-7 ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*”** Wow! Jesus is coming to be King of Israel. The kingdom of God is coming.

Is 45:17 ***“But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.”*** Same as above.

Is 60 This prophetic chapter describes how Israel will become the kingdom of God and prosper forever. This did not happen but it could have if Jesus had been received by the leaders.

Is 62:4 ***“No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land***

Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.”

Jer 31:31-34 “*‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”* God is prophesying here about the people of Israel and Judah, not today’s Christians.

Ezek 39:27-28 “*When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.”*

Amos 9:15 ***“I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,’ says the LORD your God.”***

Mal 3:12 ***“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the LORD Almighty.”*** God wanted to establish the kingdom of heaven in Israel 2000 years ago. But instead, Jesus had to proclaim: ***“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”*** (Mt. 21:43)

Mt 2:6 ***“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”*** Jesus the King!

Certainly, none of the above prophesies came to pass 2000 years ago, but that does not mean they were intended for a future “return” of the Lord in the distant future. (See chapter 12) Jesus came to make this happen in his own lifetime, but such an outcome required the faith and obedience of the leaders of Israel.

As for prophesy in general, proclamations of God have always been contingent upon human cooperation, faithfulness and obedience. God has clearly made the decision to NOT be “*in control*” of human affairs, as was explained in Chapter 2, but rather to reserve for his children a portion of responsibility either to

respond to him or not to respond to him.

Mt 4:17 *“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”* (KJV – *‘is at hand.’*)

Mt 6:10 *“...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Mt 21:35-43 *“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’ they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”*

Mt 23:13 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”*

Mt 23:37 *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”*

Mt 26:21, 24 *“And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me... The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born...”*

Mt 26:38 *“Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”*

Mk 1:15 *“‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’”*

Mk 12:6 *“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”* Jesus was explaining to us in this parable God’s expectation in sending him to us and how it did not go as God hoped and planned.

Lk 1:17 *“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to*

make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Prepared for what? Prepared to receive Jesus as the messiah and have faith and obedience in front of him. God’s kingdom was **“at hand.”**

Lk 1:32-33 **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”** Adherents to doctrine insist this is only a spiritual kingdom. Really? Why? These kingship prophecies are referring to Israel, not heaven.

Of course we must embody the kingdom **“within us,”** as Jesus said. (Lk 17:21) We must become citizens of the kingdom in our hearts. God’s kingdom cannot be a place full of unrepentant sinners. But Jesus taught us to pray for God’s kingdom **“on earth.”** (Mt 6:10) The experts have effectively stolen the kingdom from us and sent it to heaven because Jesus said **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** (Jn 18:36) **“This world”** does not mean this planet “earth.” **“This world”** was referring to this fallen, sinful, ungodly “world;” Satan’s world. (Rom 12:2)

Lk 1:68-79 **“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his**

holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, tells what is going on in Israel, telling of Jesus (the “*horn of salvation*”) and of his son John and how they will bring God’s kingdom.

Lk 6:16 “*Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*” “Traitor.” “Traitor.” What does that word mean?

Lk 13:34 “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*” Things did not go as Jesus wanted them to. He was frustrated and disappointed.

Lk 19:41-44 “*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from*

your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”

” Could it be any clearer. This all transpired in 70 A.D. when 90% of the Roman army crushed Jerusalem. Jesus called this God’s “***punishment.***” (Lk 21:22)

Lk 22:3 “***Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.***” Is Satan helping God to carry out his plans?

Lk 23:34 “***Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’***” Adherents of doctrine try to explain this troublesome statement of Jesus by twisting it to mean, “*they don’t know what a good thing they are doing by killing me.*”

Jn 3:19-20 “**This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.**”

Jn 5:23, 37-47 “***Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him...***” Adherents of doctrine say God did not want the leaders of Israel to honor the Son and thereby enable him to bring God’s kingdom because Jesus needed to be rejected so he could atone for our sins by dying, the greatest of all sins being rejecting God’s Son when he sent him. The

adherents of doctrine see no salvation in God's kingdom; only in Jesus' blood sacrifice.

Jn 5:37-47 ***“And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”*** ***“I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me;*** ***but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”***

Jn 6:70 ***“Then Jesus replied, ‘Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!’”*** A “devil” does not help God.

Jn 8:37-44 ***“I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no***

room for my word. *I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.* 'Abraham is our father,' they answered. 'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do what Abraham did. *As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.*

Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father. 'We are not illegitimate children,' they protested. 'The only Father we have is God himself.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. *He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'*” What is Jesus saying? Read this carefully. The devil's desire is to kill Jesus. That is what he is saying.

Jn 13:2, 21 "The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus... After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.'” Hello! Jesus said he was *"troubled in spirit."* If this

was all according to God's plan, Jesus would have no reason to be **"troubled."** And again, what does the word **"betray"** mean? The adherents of doctrine will defend Judas and tell you that *"someone had to do it."* That was clearly **not** Jesus' view of Judas. See above.

Jn 15:23-25 ***"Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'***" Isaiah 53:9 came to pass, but their faithlessness and hatred was a **"sin."**

Jn 16:2-3 ***"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me."*** The adherents of doctrine say that God wanted it this way. Salvation has become plagued with such mysteries because doctrines are sometimes contradictory to what the Bible is actually saying.

Jn 18:36 ***"Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'***" This passage is interpreted by adherents of doctrine to mean that Jesus' kingdom is not an earthly one but one in heaven. However, he prayed and taught us to pray ***"Your kingdom come, your will be***

done on earth.” Jesus is not saying in this passage that his kingdom is not an earthly one. He is saying it is not of the sinful, fallen world. **“This world”** refers not to the planet earth but to this fallen, sinful world rather than God’s intended world. (Rom 12:2)

Acts 1:24-25 **“Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’”** Where are they referring to? Should Judas be given a special dose of grace for being the one who betrayed Jesus because *“someone had to do it,”* according to the adherents of doctrine? No. They are saying Judas belongs in hell.

Acts 7:51-53 **“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”**

1Cor 2:8 **“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”** Paul acknowledges that it was what had to happen to Jesus, but he states here that their actions were done in ignorance. This does not alter the point that Jesus’ original and primary purpose was to

bring God's kingdom but he was rejected and forced to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah 53 instead.

No one is disputing the fact that Jesus did have to give his life on the cross and atone for our sins with his blood. The question here is, was it Jesus' sole purpose in being born? The adherents of doctrine have declared the case "closed." This makes it necessary for them to explain away all the overwhelming number of Scriptures which tell a different story, one of God's kingdom being "*at hand.*" They must explain away the prophecies of Isaiah and others and redefine them as pointing the way to some distant future time in history. They must make up excuses for Jesus' tearful remorse over the failure of the people to recognize him and receive him. They must sweep under the carpet Jesus' stern warnings of what will happen to them because of their faithlessness. They must label Jesus' tearful prayer in Gethsemane the product of human cowardice and frailty because they can't imagine any other reason why Jesus might not want to die for us. And, they have to twist Jesus' final words on the cross to be a plea for God to forgive us because we didn't know what a good thing we were doing in killing his Son.

Be very careful of doctrines. Your eternal salvation is being colored by many of them.

7. Jesus baptized with water

Water baptism is an integral part of almost any Christian church. It is the starting point of most Christian converts and of many children born into the faith. How could you call yourself a Christian without being baptized? Right? Who questions the basis of this in the Bible?

Certainly in the Great Commission, Jesus tells his disciples to ***“baptize them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit.”*** (Mt 28:19) This was said after Jesus was crucified, but there are other instances where Jesus directed his disciples to baptize during his ministry on earth. Where did this practice or ritual come from and what was its purpose?

John the Baptist (John the Baptizer), son of the priest Zechariah and kin of Jesus, began this practice throughout all of Judea. He said his was a ***“baptism with water for repentance.”*** (Mt 3:11) He baptized thousands of Jewish people and was greatly respected for it. Even the leadership of Israel feared his

growing influence among the people. (Mk 6:20) He even baptized Jesus.

However, we find an interesting statement in the Book of John: ***“in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.”*** (Jn 4:2) Why would Jesus himself not do the actual baptizing? Was it below him to do so? Didn't Jesus believe in baptism?

We find the answer to this from the words of John, himself. He said, ***“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*** (Matt 3:11) Here ***“fire”*** means the Word of God or Truth of God. ***“Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD,”*** (Jer 23:29) Mark 1:8 echoes a similar statement. Similarly, John 1:33 says, ***“And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”***

So the question is, did Jesus baptize with water? It seems not. Did he believe in baptism? He did. But, Jesus' baptism was far greater than the water baptism of John. Jesus' baptism was of God's Word and the Holy Spirit, rather than water.

What implications might this have for the Christian faith? Water baptism is still important since Jesus told his disciples to do so. Perhaps it was to connect with the well-respected work of

John, and make a bridge to John's preparatory work to make "***a people prepared for the lord.***" (Lk 1:17) In any case, not only should a Christian believer receive the water baptism of John for repentance, it seems clear that the baptism of Jesus must be obtained as well. One could make the case that the baptism of John is merely preparation for the true baptism of Jesus.

The author of 1Peter gave a somewhat different perspective looking back on John's water baptism as symbolic of Jesus' greater baptism. He wrote: "***and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***" (1Pet 3:21)

Has the Christian faith gotten stuck in the water baptism of John? Has reliance on water baptism alone become another doctrine loosely related to the actual narratives of God's Word in the Bible? Certainly many, if not most, Christian communities stress the value of God's Word and God's Truth and that of the Holy Spirit, but do we recognize these as the actual baptism which Jesus brought to us? If not, why not? It appears to be another case of doctrine vs Scripture.

8. St. John the Baptist

John the Baptist is such an icon of the Christian faith that thousands of churches bear his namesake. His fame and acclaim are based on some impressive testimonial words he spoke about Jesus and his baptism of the Lord. He is also the one person in the Gospels to receive a direct revelation from God about who Jesus really was and is, following his baptism at the River Jordan. However, this widely acclaimed record of John ignores many contrasting facts which seriously taint John's glowing reputation.

The story of John the Baptist starts with the Book of Malachi where he writes that God will send Elijah the prophet *“before the great and terrible day of the lord.”* (Mal 4:5) Elijah had lived hundreds of years earlier and his return was to mark the imminent arrival of the messiah for many Jews. Even today, Jews are still awaiting the return of Elijah to herald the coming of their messiah. No Elijah; no messiah. It is a very significant part of Jewish faith and was at the time of Jesus.

Flash forward 400 years and we find the angel Gabriel appearing to the priest Zechariah and telling him that he and his

wife would be bearing a son at their advanced age and that this son (John) would be coming ***“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*** He said this son would also ***“make a people prepared for the lord.”*** (Lk 1:17) This was very very significant. No Elijah; no messiah.

Unfortunately, Zechariah didn't initially believe the angel, and when John was born and circumcised, he somehow neglected to proclaim to his newborn son the critical revelation that he had come ***“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*** (Lk 1:64-79)

Fast forward another 30 years and Jesus meets John at the River Jordan and asks John to baptize him. They are kin. John's mother and Jesus' mother are cousins. Jesus certainly doesn't need baptism by John but there is some important meaning to this ceremony. John offers an honorific greeting as he sees Jesus approach and complies with Jesus' insistence that he baptize him.

Following the baptism, the vision of a dove appears over Jesus' head and a voice from heaven proclaims: ***“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”*** (Mt 3:17) WOW! John is told directly by God that Jesus is the long-awaited messiah and savior.

John's response is curious. He proclaims the message of God which he had just received but then walks away from Jesus, never to return to his side. The following day, John sees Jesus walking by and again says some seemingly elevated words of praise about Jesus. Then he watches as two of his disciples go and follow Jesus out of their own curiosity, but John himself never joins with or even

follows the savior.

The next thing we read about John is that he is arrested and jailed for accusing King Herod's sister-in-law of having an affair with the King and he awaits his beheading in his prison cell. Revealingly, he sends a couple of his disciples to Jesus to ask him an important question: ***“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”*** (Mt 11:4-14) Hello! Jesus responds to their question very bluntly and explains that even the least person in heaven is more qualified to enter than John. In other words, unless you believe in purgatory, the ***“greatest man ever born of woman”*** is going to hell.

What happened here? John said some good words about Jesus but he never lifted a finger for Jesus. He never took his side in Jesus' ministry. He even denied being the critical missing ***“Elijah”*** when grilled about his identity and role. (Jn 1:21) Of course, he was not literally Elijah the prophet who appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, but Gabriel had told John's father that his son was coming ***“in the spirit and power of Elijah,”*** a necessary role for Jesus to be accepted as the messiah.

Isaiah had given several different prophesies about the coming Messiah. Chapters 9, 11 and 60 tell of a messiah who would be embraced and acclaimed by Israel and lifted up as its king, literally, ushering in everlasting peace and God's kingdom. Isaiah's Chapter 53 prophesied of a rejected and suffering messiah who would bear

our sins and be tortured to death. Because the Bible records that God has always and universally refused to interfere in man's free will and choices, either of these scenarios could come to pass. It would depend upon man's acceptance or rejection of the messiah, when he comes.

Enter John, a highly respected son of a priest and kin of Jesus. John was uniquely positioned to stand with Jesus in the position of Peter, to make *“a people prepared for the Lord,”* (Lk 1:17) and to testify of Jesus first to his own father, the priest, and subsequently to all the leadership of Israel. John even had the ear and respect of King Herod. (Mk 6:20) With the unwavering conviction and active support of John by Jesus' side, the glorious prophecies of Is 9, 11 and 60 could have literally become a reality.

But, where was John? He talked the talk, but he didn't walk it. He even contradicted Jesus and undermined his credibility by denying that he was Elijah. (Jn 1:21) Jesus said 3 times in the Gospels that John was the critical return of *“Elijah.”* (Mt 11:14; 17:10-13; Mk 9:11-13) The Jews today are still awaiting the return of Elijah who heralds the coming of the Messiah. They missed them both. John's failure to stand strongly with Jesus was the single most cause of this situation.

But, we have our doctrinal perspective about John. Wasn't he great? Some adherents to doctrine say that baptizing people with water for repentance and voicing his revelation after the baptism of

Jesus was John's only responsibility to "*prepare a people for the Lord.*" How weak is that? John's potential to attend and serve and help Jesus was far beyond that. This highly respected and followed "Elijah" figure was groomed by God to stand resolutely with Jesus in the position of Peter.

But, there is no record that John caused *anyone* to go to Jesus and become his disciple, including Andrew and his friend who went to Jesus out of their own curiosity. (Jn 1:35-40) Would it not be John's blessing and responsibility to bring people to Jesus after God directly revealed to him who Jesus was? Why would God reveal to John who Jesus was if not to actively bring people to Jesus?

John, himself, did not even follow Jesus. Wasn't John a sinner like you and I in need of the salvation of Jesus? John's followers still exist today and are now called "Mandaeans." They live in Iraq, Iran and Australia and they do not follow Jesus. Who taught them that? Our doctrine does not address these serious questions.

It is not necessary to go to graduate school to understand this. A simple reading of Jesus' own words in Mt 11:11-14 tell us how we should regard John. According to Jesus, John did not live up to his own calling in life and did not fulfill his responsibility before Jesus. He was not fit for heaven.

We have believed our faith was based on the Bible narratives when again in this case it was clearly not. Should a believer be

righteously indignant about this? We must take off the blinders so we can make an informed decision as to whether we should base our faith upon doctrines or upon the Word of God.

9. God needs blood for the atonement of sins

A pivotal doctrine and pillar of the Christian faith is that the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus on the cross was the only way our sins could be atoned for, or forgiven. A cornerstone of this doctrine can be found in a single passage of Scripture, namely Hebrews 9:22. What does it say?

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

This passage is believed to be reinforced by several other passages wherein Jesus declares ***“I must go just as it is written”*** (Mt 26:24) and also passages such as Rev. 13:8, which reads: ***“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.”*** The

controversial rendering of this last Scripture passage was already discussed in Chapter 3. On the face of Paul's statement, it would seem that a blood sacrifice is an absolute requirement for the atonement of sins. However, he also includes the words "***nearly everything.***" Why?

A simple review of the Old Testament reveals that atonement for sin was most often satisfied by a blood sacrifice or burnt offering, but there were numerous other ways to atone for sin acceptable to God. These included the scapegoat, faith and obedience, money, oil, flour, live bird, incense, meat, drink, jewelry and shewbread.

Which method of atonement did God *prefer*, if any? You would think it would be the blood sacrifice/burnt offering. But NO! That is clearly NOT the case, according to God's Word in the Bible. Consider the following several passages of Scripture:

Hosea 6:6 "***For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.***"

Prov 16:6 "***Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for...***"

1Sam 15:22 "***Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.***"

Micah 6:6-8 "***With what shall I come before the LORD and***

bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Psalms 51:15-17 *“Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”*

From these several passages of Scripture, we can see that God does NOT prefer blood sacrifice/burnt offering for the atonement of sin. How about the scapegoat method of atonement? Leviticus 16:10 explains what atonement by a scapegoat means:

“But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.”

It is commonly believed that Jesus was the scapegoat for our

sins, but in what context? The shedding of Jesus' precious blood on the cross was unquestionably atonement for our sins, but it doesn't seem to fit the definition of a living scapegoat. Jesus was actually atoning for sin as the scapegoat when he went out into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and enduring the temptations of Lucifer. As the scapegoat, he was a *living* sacrifice. After atoning for sin as a scapegoat, he forgave the sins of any individuals who showed faith and obedience to him. But if that is true, if Jesus already atoned for sin as the scapegoat, then why would he have to *again* atone for sin as a blood sacrifice on the cross?

Jesus came to atone for the sins of all of Israel and even for all of mankind, not just for a handful of faithful and obedient individuals who came to him. (Jn 3:16) Had the representatives of all the people of Israel, the priests and leaders, come to Jesus in faith and obedience to him, then the requirement to receive Jesus' forgiveness would have been satisfied on the national level and the living scapegoat could have declared the nation of Israel forgiven. Jesus had the authority to do that. But they came to him instead with scorn and disbelief. Thus, the nation of Israel could not be forgiven. So, to atone for the sins of not only Israel but even for all of us, beyond the handful of individuals who came to him, Jesus had no choice but to walk the path prophesied in Isaiah 53 and make the ultimate offering of atonement with his blood.

This leads us back to our original question: *Does God need blood to atone for sin?* The answer from God's Word in the Bible is obviously no. God's Word in the Bible says there are many acceptable ways to atone for sin, as previously stated. However, Jesus absolutely needed to offer his life and precious blood as an atonement for sin because of the faithlessness of the leaders of Israel. This may sound blasphemous when compared with the doctrine we are all more than familiar with, but it is perfectly orthodox when held up to God's Word as found in the Bible.

So why then did Jesus say more than once: ***"I must go as it is written"***? (Mk 14:21) That is absolutely correct because when the prophecies of Isaiah 9, 11 and 60 became impossible to fulfill due to the rejection and faithlessness of the leadership of Israel, then Jesus had to ***"go as it is written"*** in Isaiah 53 and become the suffering and bruised Lord bearing our sins on the cross. It is all logical and consistent.

These questions have everything to do with our eternal salvation. Comb the Bible from beginning to end to find the basis for your life of faith. Carefully reflect on everything the Word of God says. Compare the doctrines that you have been taught to what the Bible actually says. It may shock you to discover that they are not always consistent.

10. Jesus resurrected physically

A cornerstone of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus resurrected from the dead physically. It is considered proof that he is God himself in human form, super-human, and the one and only who has conquered death. Believers are reminded of it on a weekly basis. Yet, where does this pillar of the faith come from?

The verses most often cited to prove that Jesus resurrected physically are these: *“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.”* (Lk 24:36-43)

And in the Book of John: ***“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”*** (Jn 20:26-28)

Add to these verses the four accounts in the Gospels of the empty tomb and this comprises the evidence most often cited to prove Jesus’ physical resurrection. And, the evidence may seem pretty compelling. It seems sufficient to build a doctrine upon.

However, let us consider 14 other passages of Scripture which speak of Jesus’ resurrection. They paint a very different picture.

When Jesus gave his eleven remaining disciples the Great Commission, the Book of Matthew recounts: ***“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”*** (Mt 28:17)

The Book of Luke recounts that Jesus ***“came up and walked along with”*** two men going down a road. They had known Jesus but now they did not recognize him. He spoke to them at length, after which they recognized who he was and then he ***“disappeared from their sight.”*** (Lk 24:16-31) Mark also recounted this scene by writing: ***“Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the***

country.” (Mk 16:12)

Soon thereafter we read: ***“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.”*** (Lk 24:51)

The Book of John describes the resurrected Jesus’ encounter with a close friend, Mary Magdalene, outside the empty tomb.

“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’). Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (Jn 20:14-17)

Then, in verse 19, he continues:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the

Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’”

In a later passage, *“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.”* (Jn 21:12)

Paul explains that Jesus *“appeared”* to many, including himself (1Cor 15:8) but when Paul elaborates on this experience when Jesus *“appeared”* to him, he clarifies that no one actually saw Jesus but just saw a light and heard a voice. (Acts 9:3-7)

Soon thereafter, Jesus came to Paul in a vision: *“The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.”* (Acts 9:10)

Another time, Jesus *“appeared”* to Paul while he was in a trance: *“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’”* (Acts 22:17-18)

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’” (Acts 23:11)

And Paul gives a lengthy and amazing explanation of how we are born in the physical body and then die and continue on in the

spiritual body. A review of all of Paul's writings makes it very clear that he had no belief whatsoever in a physical resurrection of Jesus, even though the resurrected Jesus "*appeared*" to him numerous times. (1Cor 15:35-52)

A related and very troublesome detail for many scholars is the fact that Paul never once mentioned the empty tomb. Paul spent time with Peter and Jesus' brother James before he began his incredible missionary tours throughout the Mediterranean area. No doubt he debriefed them about Jesus to learn all he could from their first-hand testimonies. After all, no one was closer to Jesus than Peter, and James was Jesus' actual brother. The point is, the incredible story of the empty tomb would most certainly be a topic of excitement and discussion for these three when they were meeting. One would expect that Paul would mention it at least once at some point. But, he did not. It raises questions that cannot be answered.

"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (Php 1:22-24)

"For Christ ... was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits." (1Pet 3:18-19)

Many theologians and scholars have settled on a compromise, calling the substance of the resurrected Jesus a “glorified body.” After all, as one Roman Catholic priest told me, *“It couldn’t have been a physical body because he appeared and disappeared even in the ‘locked’ upper room on several occasions.”* And, the priest continued, *“It couldn’t have been a spiritual body because Jesus said ‘I am not a spirit’ (or ghost). So, we call it a ‘glorified body.’”* I asked him, *“What’s that?”* He answered, *“We don’t know, but we have to call it something.”* Certainly the Bible is the place to resolve this dilemma and all the information we need is found therein.

There are two problems with our efforts to understand and reconcile this. The first problem is that our understanding of the nature of spiritual entities and spiritual bodies is weak. We must be reminded of how an angel wrestled with Jacob at the ford of Jabbok and dislocated his thigh bone. (Gen 32:24-28; Hos 12:4) That takes substantial contact between a physical person and a spirit which has only a spiritual body. Not only that, but we recall that Lot invited two angels into his home and they **“ate”** a meal which he offered them. (Gen 19:3) And, some of the men of the town wanted to have sex with them. Some people also believe that angels had sex with earthly women and they bore giants. (Gen 6:4)

The point is, the Bible testifies to us that spiritual bodies can be very tangible in the earthly realm if they want to be. Thus, based on the Word of God in the Bible, it would not be necessary for Jesus to be physical to be seen, touched and even to eat a meal.

The second problem we have is our understanding of the use of the word “*ghost*” or “*spirit*” in the various versions of the Bible. We read in the Book of John, “*They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”* (Lk 24:37-39) In spite of all the other passages of Scripture we have cited, this one appears to be a “deal killer.” Jesus says I am not a ghost (or spirit in other translations). That would seem to settle it. However, this would leave us with some very troublesome Scriptures which would seem impossible to reconcile with each other, as we have seen. The good news is, with a little more insight we can clear up this issue, as well.

In the King James Bible, RSV and others, Jesus says in this passage “*a spirit hath not...*” In the New International Version, it reads, “*a ghost does not...*” You may think this is insignificant, but it is far from it. In the King James Version, a “ghost” refers to a Divine spirit, such as the Holy Ghost. “Spirit” refers to a

fearsome dark apparition, often not so substantial. In the NIV, the word “spirit” refers to a Divine spirit, such as the Holy Spirit and “ghost” refers to a fearsome dark apparition, often not so substantial.

Thus, upon closer inspection, Jesus is simply allaying the fears of the disciples. He is assuring them that he is not a fearsome “*spirit*” or “*ghost.*” He appeared and disappeared in the locked room where the disciples were meeting. There is no contradiction or mystery here. The resurrected Jesus is a Divine spirit (or ghost, depending upon which version of the Bible you are reading) and not to be feared. That is what he was making clear to his disciples.

A Divine spirit (or ghost) is very bright and substantial, it can be touched. Thus, Jesus even said, “*a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*” (Lk 24:39) That is the meaning. Paul even warned us to be careful because we might entertain angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:2) The women embraced Jesus’ feet (Mt 28:9) when they met him again after leaving the empty tomb. Again, Jacob wrestled violently with an angel, all night. A Divine spirit can eat a meal.

It is all right there in the Bible. The Word of God is consistent and without contradiction. We just have to consider all that it says, from beginning to end, in order to make sense of some things. Jesus resurrected in his spiritual body; tangible,

substantial, but different in appearance. He appeared and disappeared numerous times and finally went home to his Father in heaven. It is all very natural.

Is the foundation of our faith God's Word in the Bible, or doctrines? Be careful. Even the experts are not perfect people and need to be questioned sometimes. The Bible is where we can find the answers and the foundation upon which to build our life of faith.

11. To believe in Jesus is sufficient for salvation

The controversy surrounding this doctrine has been boiling for a long time and continues until today. Believers on one side say faith alone is sufficient for salvation, while believers on the other side say *“faith without works is dead,”* quoting the Book of James. (James 2:26) Unfortunately, as we will see, both sides are out-of-sync with the deeper message of Jesus in the Bible.

Those who say faith alone is sufficient usually refer to the following passages of Scripture, among others:

Jn 1:12 *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

Jn 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Jn 6:29 *“Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”*

Rom 3:22 ***“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”***

Rom 10:9 ***“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”***

1Cor 1:21 ***“...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”***

Gal 3:22 ***“...what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.”***

Faith and obedience are clearly sufficient to receive the forgiveness of sins, as demonstrated in dozens of instances with Jesus. It is also called the doctrine of justification by faith. It is an essential part of salvation. But, is it the *fullness* of salvation? Is this all that Jesus was requiring of us? Does forgiveness of our sins through faith fulfill the salvation Jesus came to give? Apparently not. Consider also these passages of Scripture:

Mt 5 (the beatitudes or Sermon on the Mount) This is the only complete sermon of Jesus that we have record of. It is the context of his “requirement” to ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** The RSV reads ***“you must be perfect...”*** However, while this is not the salvation of justification

through faith and the resultant forgiveness that Jesus gives us, it is part of the bigger picture of “salvation.”

There is both justification and sanctification included in the overall package of “salvation.” Here Jesus is teaching us about the “sanctification” component. And, there are numerous other passages of Scripture which indicate that belief is NOT enough. For example:

Mt 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mt 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”

Acts 10:34-35 “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”

Acts 26:19-20 “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.”

Rom 2:6 “God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.”

Titus 1:16 “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”

Ja 1:22 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Ja 2:14-26 “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?...In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Rev 2:5, 23 “Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place...Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”

Rev 20:12-13 “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”

Rev 20:13 ***“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.”***

Rev 22:12 ***“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”***

What is this other half of “salvation,” namely sanctification? It means cleaning ourselves up from our self-centered, greedy and lustful sin-nature and making ourselves holy and acceptable to the Lord. The Bible says in Malachi: ***“The Lord seeks godly offspring.”*** (Mal 2:15) Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, ***“You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”***

However, both sides of this discussion are missing the deeper point. The deeper message is this: Jesus is *not* simply telling us to do good things. It is not good works alone. It is not walking the talk. It is not just *“faith with works.”* Jesus was not just talking about doing good things in the Sermon on the Mount.

He was talking about *becoming* new people. He was describing the character that God wants to see in us. He was describing aspects of a perfect person; a person of mature personality in God’s image. (Gen 1:26) He was basically saying, ***“Become like me.” “Be transformed by the renewing of your***

mind.” (Rom 12:2) That’s *not* being content to be just an “apple” Christian, red only on the outside. It means becoming a “tomato” Christian; one who is red all the way through.

Are we founding our spiritual life and faith on God’s Word in the Holy Bible, or upon doctrines? To believe is not all that Jesus and God want and expect from us. It is not enough if one is to become fully “saved.” Be vigilant. Read carefully and thoroughly, from beginning to end in the Bible. That is where we will find the foundation of our faith.

12. Isaiah 9, 11, and 60 refer to the return of Christ

Christian scholars and readers interpret Isaiah's Chapters 9, 11, 53 and 60 to refer to the coming of Jesus. However, Chapters 9, 11 and 60 are totally different from Chapter 53. Whereas Chapters 9, 11 and 60 paint the picture of a glorious reception of the savior and his unending kingship over Israel, Isaiah 53 speaks of the Lord's rejection, suffering and execution as he bears the burden of our sin. Everyone surmises that Isaiah 53 accurately describes Jesus' life 2000 years ago. But what do we do with Isaiah 9, 11 and 60?

Scholars have decided that these passages of Scripture must refer to the return of Christ in the unknown distant future, when he will literally reign as king over God's kingdom on earth. After all, these prophecies were not fulfilled 2000 years ago. What else could it be? That would be a logical guess, but based on what? This doctrine seems to be based on conjecture and an interesting new premise regarding prophesy.

Up until the time of Jesus' birth and even until today, the Jewish chosen people have been crystal clear about one thing: when they had faith and obedience before God, they were blessed as God had promised them. When they did not have faith and obedience before God, they were cursed for their sin and they suffered. They were exercising their human portion of responsibility before God and there were consequences for it, either way, good or bad.

For some reason, once Jesus was born, the concept of man's portion of responsibility before God faded into the background. It became very weak. Our responsibility became mostly a personal one, to have faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; disconnected from the big picture; disconnected from prophecy. The concept of a God who was "*in control*" of the big picture became much stronger, even dominant. We could choose to have faith in Jesus and be saved, but God must be "*in control*" of everything else, regardless of our faith or lack of it.

Thus, it doesn't even enter our minds today to consider the possibility that all four of Isaiah's prophetic chapters were referring to Jesus' coming 2000 years ago and not to a distant future return. In other words, if the nation of Israel had responded to Jesus as God had expected (Mt 21:37) and embraced his son in faith and obedience, made him their king and received the forgiveness of sin that Jesus was ready and able to give even

before his death (Mt 9:6), then the world today would not only have Jesus' salvation of forgiveness, but we would all be living in God's Kingdom on earth by now.

However, if the nation of Israel failed to recognize and embrace Jesus as the Messiah and, instead of faith and obedience they rejected him and killed him (Mt 21:39), then his sacrifice would still extend his forgiveness to any individual person with faith and obedience, but the earthly kingdom would be postponed until a more opportune time in the future.

In other words, there was no reason to look beyond Jesus' life 2000 years ago in terms of all four of Isaiah's prophetic chapters. Doctrine says that God planned Jesus' rejection and future return from day-one; from the beginning. If we somehow forget the nature of prophesy in that it is contingent upon man's response to it, then this may be correct. But, man has always been responsible before God and the fulfillment of God's will has always depended upon it. We have continually disappointed him and broken his heart by our faithlessness and disobedience.

God may not have intended a return appearance of his son. God wanted to see his kingdom on earth 2000 years ago. Jesus told us so in his prayer. (Mt 6:10) Salvation would by definition be included in God's kingdom on earth. All would have been accomplished at that time if Jesus had been welcomed with faith and obedience, which is God's requirement for the atonement of

sin. Why not? Is God incapable? Do we need a couple more thousand years of hell and suffering? Does God want to give a little more time for a few more people to qualify for heaven while the rest predictably suffer forever in hell?

It is faithless mankind that has always frustrated God's work to bring his kingdom. The Bible testifies to this from beginning to end. The Bible says he wishes that no one perishes, not even one. (2Pet 3:9) And lest we forget about God's punishment of the faithless and disobedient, recall what Jesus said about Israel after its rejection of him:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.” (Lk 21:20-22) This was fulfilled in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

The bottom line here is, the belief that Isaiah 9, 11 and 60 were prophecies about the return of Christ would seem like a logical deduction but it has no basis in Scripture and creates inconsistency with everything the Old Testament and even the New Testament is telling us. God works through the partnership of himself and man. That partnership has been recorded as a

history of man's repeated frustration and betrayal of God. By forgetting this intentional relationship of free will and responsibility between man and God, the false expectations that it creates appears to have resulted in questionable doctrines that we have come to rest our eternal salvation upon.

The answer: Study God's Word as it is in the Bible once again, from beginning to end, and reboot the foundation of your faith.

13. Jesus defeated Satan

There can be no question that Jesus defeated Satan when he resurrected after his crucifixion. Satan thought that he had put an end to Jesus by instigating his betrayal and execution. (Lk 22:3-4) He was wrong. Jesus returned and has built his Church from the ground up; from scratch.

However, the question here is, did Jesus defeat Satan in your life and my life and in this earthly world, or only personally?

It is a widely-held belief that Jesus defeated Satan for us all, or at least for those who have faith and believe and call on his name. What is the basis for this belief? Is it based in God's Word in the Bible? Let's take a look.

While not written about explicitly, Satan was stalking Jesus to destroy him even from his birth, trying to work through King Herod and others to kill him. Satan showed up in-person to tempt Jesus and try to destroy him when he was fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. (Lk 4:2) And finally, the Bible says "***Satan entered Judas Iscariot...***" and he betrayed Jesus. (Lk 22:3-4)

Certainly, Jesus defeated the power of darkness and death in resurrecting after his crucifixion, but what do we find in the letters of Paul and others after Jesus' death?

Act 5:3 ***"Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart... ?'"***

Act 26:18 ***"...to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."***

Rom 16:20 ***"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."***

1Co 5:5 ***"...hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord."***

1Co 7:5 ***"...Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."***

2Co 2:11 ***"...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."***

2Co 11:14 ***"And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."***

2Co 12:7 ***"Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."***

1Th 2:18 “...Satan blocked our way.”

2Th 2:9 “*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,...*”

1Ti 1:20 “*Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.*”

1Ti 5:15 “*Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.*”

Clearly the early disciples perceived that Satan was alive and well and working in the world and in the hearts and minds of fallen people, including themselves, after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

How about in the future, then? The Book of Revelation tells us that Satan still runs to and fro in this world and will continue to do so until the end:

Rev 2:9 “*I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*”

Rev 2:13 “*I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce*

your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.”

Rev 2:24 *“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you,...’”*

Rev 3:9 *“I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”*

Rev 12:9 *“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*

Rev 20:2 *“He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”*

Rev 20:7 *“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison...”* This reference to “a thousand years” refers to the future as many experts understand it, and not to today.

And, few believers would deny that Satan is alive and well and working tirelessly in the world today. The question is, are those who have faith and believe and call on his name outside of Satan’s influence today? From the readings above, we see this is

not the case.

Therefore, the belief that Jesus defeated Satan for all faithful disciples or for the whole world, while widespread, seems to have no basis at all in God's Word in the Bible. Many consider it a Biblical truth, but it is obviously not founded on what is written in the Bible.

14. Peter was leading the Church in Rome

The basis for the Roman Catholic Church to claim the authority of Peter as the first vicar or Pope of the Church lies in several historical writings, according to them, one of which is the Holy Bible. Catholic scholars claim that Peter was with Paul in Rome and was leading the Church there. This authority was then passed on to a succession of Roman Catholic popes until today.

Catholic scholars point to Jesus' statement that ***“upon this rock I will build my church,”*** (Mt 16:18) taking ***“rock”*** to mean the person of Peter. Other scholars believe the ***“rock”*** of which Jesus spoke was the rock of ***“faith”*** being demonstrated in that moment by the disciple Peter.

The controversy goes on and on and gets somewhat messy, questioning Peter's qualification to be the ***“rock”*** in light of his repeated denials of Jesus just before his crucifixion, etc. In any case, let us focus on the Biblical evidence to support the claim that Peter was in fact in Rome as leader of the Church.

St. Paul was definitely in Rome where he was imprisoned and beheaded and wrote his famous Epistle to the Romans and other letters. He mentioned 50 leaders of the local Church community by name in his letter to the Romans, but never once mentioned Peter's name.

Paul was a close friend of Peter. They spent time together, and with James, the brother of Jesus, before Paul began his missionary journeys around the Mediterranean Sea. Scholars point out that it is more than odd that Paul never once mentioned Peter in this letter. It would be unthinkable to not mention Peter if he were there.

A controversial reference to 1Pet 5:13 is cited by Catholic scholars to justify their claim. The official Catholic Bible quotes Peter (assuming the author was actually Peter) as saying: ***“The Church here in Babylon, united with you by God’s election, sends you her greeting, and so does my son, Mark”*** Other translations of the Bible curiously do not include the critical word ***“here”***.

For example, in the World English Bible, the same passage reads: ***“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, greets you; and so does Mark, my son.”*** The Revised Standard Version says: ***“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.”*** The New International Version reads: ***“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with***

you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.” The King James Version reads: *“The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.”* The word *“Babylon”* was sometimes used as a code word for Rome by some writers. It is important to note, however, that the real Babylon still existed when this letter was written. So, this passage may not have referred to Rome at all.

Other non-Biblical documents are cited by Catholic scholars to reinforce their assertion that Peter was in Rome and was leading the Church faithful, and thus initiating the succession of apostolic leadership until today.

What do you say? The doctrine of men vs the Word of God in the Bible? The decision is yours.

15. Jesus is speaking of good Christians in terms of “*Him who overcomes.*”

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to a man named John throughout the first three chapters and then John is given an excursion through the spirit world where he sees the future of things to come leading up to Christ’s ultimate return. That view of the Book of Revelation is not accepted by all scholars by any means. It is the subject of discussion and debate. However, the traditional view mentioned above is the perspective of the author of this book.

As the Book of Revelation begins, the writer “John” describes the circumstances of his extraordinary experience. He explains that Jesus himself spoke to him and directed him to “*write on a scroll what you see...*” (Rev. 1:11). It must be emphasized that this is Jesus Christ, himself, speaking to John and to us. For the remainder of the Book of Revelation, John is taken into the spirit world where he witnesses a series of mystical and difficult-to-decipher events

pertaining to the End Times and the Lord's return.

Within all of this is an enormously important message from Jesus that scholars and other readers of the Bible have totally missed. We have been prevented from seeing this critical and vital message because of doctrinal walls that have effectively blocked our view.

The focus of Jesus' message has to do with ***“He who overcomes”*** (or ***“who conquers,”*** or ***“who is the victor”***). Traditional Christian doctrine requires that Jesus be speaking here about wonderful, successful Christians... believers who overcome all trials and temptations of the Evil One and persevere in faith until the very end. Any of us could be one of those who ***“overcomes.”*** That is what we have thought and been taught.

But, is Jesus really talking about wonderful, successful Christians when he talks about ***“Him who overcomes?”*** No, in fact he is not. Then, is Jesus talking about himself in the third person (ex: *“the son of man”*) as he so often did in the Gospels? In fact, it cannot be the case. In fact, he is not. He is talking about one specific individual. He is talking about *someone*. Let's take a closer look.

Just who is Jesus referring to? The key word in this question is ***“he”*** or ***“him.”*** Consider Rev. 2:17... Jesus said:

“...To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

What is the symbolism of the “*stone*” and especially a “*white stone?*” Will all faithful believers get a white stone with a new name on it? That is what many have been taught. But no. We will soon see that Jesus was not saying that.

And whose “*new name*” will be on the white stone? Consider Rev. 3:12...

“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”

Who is speaking here? It is Jesus Christ himself speaking, as attested to by the *Expositor’s Bible* and other major Bible commentaries. Jesus is telling us that the person he refers to as “*HE*” will be given a new name. And it is the new name of Jesus (The Lord) himself. It will not be a familiar name. No one knows the name except the one who receives it. And who will do the writing? Jesus.

Clearly Jesus is not talking about giving this new name to all the saints who have been faithful to him. The following is more evidence that he is talking about a specific *someone*. Consider Rev. 19:11-16... Here John speaks of what he is given to see and

experience in the spirit world after receiving the direct testimony of Jesus, himself. John shares with us the following vision:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is The Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Here John *sees* the one who is coming with *“a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.”* Who is he? Christians everywhere have assumed this to be Jesus at his return! After all, he is making war and judging the world from atop a white horse. He is followed by the armies of heaven. The sword of truth issues forth from his mouth with which he smites the nations. He wears a robe dipped in blood. On his robe is written: *“**King of kings and Lord of lords.**”*

But again, **WHO IS THE WRITER?** It is Jesus. Jesus is doing the writing. **WHO IS THE ONE WRITTEN UPON?**

Someone else. Not Jesus. **WHO WROTE “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” UPON HIM?** Jesus! Is it becoming clearer now? The one on the white horse is not Jesus.

Consider Rev. 2:26-27... Jesus himself is speaking to John:

“To *him* who overcomes and does my will to the end, *I* will give authority over the nations -- he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father.”

Jesus is clearly speaking of a specific *someone*; someone who is serving as an extension of himself.

These passages make three critical points. Jesus is saying, **“*I* will give *him* authority over the nations.”** “*I*” is Jesus and “*him*” is someone else. Secondly Jesus said, **“*He* shall rule them with an iron scepter.”** He did not say “*I*.” And thirdly, Jesus removes any lingering doubts by declaring, **“just as *I* have received authority from my Father.”** This makes it finally clear that Jesus is talking about someone else; someone very special who will serve as an extension of himself.

“But perhaps this is an angel talking for and about Jesus?” DEFINITELY NOT. This is Jesus Christ talking. There is no question about that. Jesus is referring to someone else who will come and rule the nations with a rod of iron, with the sword of truth issuing forth from his mouth, who will lead the armies of heaven in

the final judgment of the world and establish God's kingdom while Jesus supervises from the Throne of God. Jesus will then grant *this person* to sit with him on his throne in heaven. Consider Rev. 3:21... Jesus himself said:

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Will millions of good Christians sit with Jesus on his throne? No. We have not allowed ourselves to see, not only in these obvious passages but throughout this mystical experience, that Jesus is speaking of **“He,” “Him,” “His,”** etc., referring not to himself as so often in the Gospels, but to someone else; a specific special person serving Jesus as the return of the Christ.

Keep in mind as you review the following passages, taken almost entirely from the Book of Revelation, that John the Baptist came **“in the spirit and power of Elijah”** as announced by the angel Gabriel to his father Zechariah. John was not actually Elijah, but he clearly came as the return of Elijah, according to Jesus' own explicit words. (refer back to chapter 8)

Notice the following, regarding the return of Christ:

will **he** find faith..... Lk 18:8

he will lead them..... Rev 7:17

He will rule them..... Rev. 19:15
He treads Rev 19:15
He will dash them Rev 2:27
He will reign Rev 11:15
reign with **him** Rev 20:6
he is coming..... Rev 1:7
out of **his** mouth Rev 1:16; 19:15, 21
him who overcomes..... Rev 2:7,17, 26; 3:12, 21
He who overcomes..... Rev 2:11; 3:5; 21:7
I will give **him** power..... Rev 2:17, 26, 28
acknowledge **his** name Rev 3:5
make **him** a pillar Rev 3:12
grant **him** to sit with me Rev 3:21
he is able to open the scroll... Rev 5:5
He took the scroll..... Rev 5:7
he was given a crown..... Rev 6:2
he rode out as a conqueror Rev 6:2
he is Lord of lords Rev 17:14
He judges and makes war Rev 19:11
His eyes..... Rev 19:12
On **his** head Rev 14:14; 19:12
he has a name Rev 19:12, 16
him who receives it..... Rev 2:17
He is dressed Rev 19:13
he is Lord of lords Rev 17:14
he is... King of kings Rev 17:14
with **him** will be **his** Rev 17:14
out of **his** mouth Rev 19:15, 21
his name Rev 3:5; 14:1; 22:4
his bride..... Rev 19:7
on **his** robe..... Rev 19:16

on **his** thigh..... Rev 19:16

So, the elephant is now squarely in the middle of the tent. Dare we pose the question? Could it be possible that Jesus is saying to us through the Book of Revelation that he will return in a manner similar to the way Elijah returned 2000 years ago, through the person of a specific special someone “*who overcomes*” and is qualified to represent him?

But two angels told Jesus’ disciples in Acts 1:11...

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

What an ironic statement. The angels are admonishing the men for “*...looking into the sky*” anticipating the return of Christ. This passage is hard to decipher but it appears to be a mistaken notion to think that the Lord will return from the sky.

Consider also John 3:13... where Jesus says:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”

Jesus “*came from heaven*” but he was born of Mary, as a human baby. No one saw Jesus float down from heaven. If we are

to see him “*come back*” from heaven by the same way as we saw him “*go into heaven,*” but we are not to look into the sky, then how did we see him “*go into heaven?*” He came from heaven being born from the womb of his mother Mary, he was made perfect through the things that he suffered (Heb 5:8-9), and he rose from the grave and went home to the Father in his eternal spirit body. As you recall from Chapter 10 of this book, the Scriptural evidence clearly indicates that Jesus resurrected spiritually, not physically. As St. Paul said, “*It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.*” (1Cor 15:44)

Thus, Jesus went to his Father in heaven in the spirit, as eyewitnesses said they saw him go (Lk 24:51), and he will return therefore not in the flesh, as we have been taught, but also in the spirit. How? Just as the spirit of Elijah returned through the person of John. Therefore, the angels were correct. There is no reason to look up into the sky anticipating the return of Jesus. He will return as we saw him go; in a most natural way.

Then, where should we look? Perhaps this is our cue to connect to the Book of Revelation where it says in verse 12:5...

“She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.”

When Jesus explained to his followers how they could find him

when he returned, he gave a rather cryptic instruction:

“Wherever the body (or carcass) is, there the eagles (or vultures) will be gathered together.” (Mt 24:28) Jesus seemed to be using the word ***“body”*** to refer to the Lord at his return. The key word in this passage, however, is not ***“body”*** but rather the word ***“eagles.”*** (or ***“vultures”*** in other translations)

Two-thousand years ago, eagles were not the symbol of freedom and democracy as in the United States today. Eagles were considered the king of predators, which is also why ***“vultures”*** is used in other translations.

What Jesus was trying to convey to us was that where you find the Lord, all the forces of evil will be gathered together to oppose him. Jesus himself defeated the power of Satan, but we still have not. (Rom 7:24; 1Jn 1:10) The Evil One is still alive and well in this fallen world, and he will not welcome the Lord’s return any more than he did before.

Similarly, Jesus was not at all confident that the returning Lord would be acclaimed by believers, at least not at first. That is why Jesus asked, ***“Will he find faith?”*** (when he returns). (Lk 18:8) All of the same kind of self-righteous and arrogant religious leaders and skeptics that opposed and betrayed Jesus 2000 years ago are alive and well today. The Lord will be hated and despised because the world prefers the ***“darkness”*** over the ***“light.”*** He will be

branded a dangerous heretic and blasphemer because the Sword of Truth which comes from his mouth will go beyond the words already given to us in the New Testament. He will not come to simply read the Book of Matthew to us. Jesus said, ***“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”*** (Jn 16:12) ***“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things.”*** (Jn 3:12)

Many of those stuck behind the concrete walls of traditional doctrines will decry him as the anti-Christ. He will be accused of every crime the devil himself is guilty of. Some evil people will call for his death. If crucifixion were in vogue, they would beg for that. Didn't Jesus warn that false prophets would deceive ***“even the elect?”*** How then will ***“the elect”*** be sure of the real one?

Obviously, doctrines will not steer us through these turbulent waters. One must carefully and thoroughly comb through God's Word in the Bible to have any chance of surviving the storm.

16. The Real Rock-Solid Foundation of the Church

The Christian Church and faith *are* founded upon rock solid granite and not sand. But this unshakable foundation is not doctrines which have little basis in God's Word in the Bible. The rock-solid foundation of Christianity is the love of God perfectly embodied, expressed and modeled for us in his son, Jesus.

He modeled for us what it means to "***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.***" (Mt 22:37) He demonstrated what it means to "***Love your neighbor as yourself; love your enemy; love one another as I have loved you.***" (Lk 10:27; Mt 5:44; Jn 13:34) He showed us the parental yearning heart of God for his wayward children; his "***lost sheep***" (Lk 15:4-6) and toward his "***prodigal sons.***" (Lk 15:11-32) He made atonement for and exercised his authority to forgive the sins of any who have faith, love and obedience before him.

His is a love that can be found no where else. Jesus was the embodiment of the Beatitudes. He was indomitable and perfectly

resonant with his Father in heaven. He loved even those who hated and killed him. He showed God's universal unconditional love for anyone and everyone. He gave his life for all people, regardless of whether they were worthy of his ultimate sacrifice or not.

Jesus himself was the rock. He founded his church upon the rock of faith; faith in the Father, faith in him and faith in God's Word. This foundation is unshakable. This is the rock-solid foundation of the house than cannot be blown down in the stormy winds of time.

Unfortunately, the fallen people who knew Jesus personally did not really understand him; they did not fully understand who he was even though he was standing right in front of them. Therefore, they and those who came after them sought to somehow improve on this already rock-solid foundation by recharacterizing Jesus as God the Creator in sandals, walking upon the earth. They in many ways made him superman; far out of the reach of us lowly mortal humans. They effectively separated us from the Divine human model and mentor of true faith and love that he came to be for us. We elevated him to such heights that we could no longer be *like* him.

And because we made Jesus into God the Creator in sandals and far beyond our mortal reach, then it became impossible for believers today to look back and fully understand who Jesus

really was and is. Jesus said, ***“You must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.”*** (Mt 5:48) A minister once told me, *“Jesus didn’t really mean that. It may have been a mistranslation or maybe he was kidding.”* That’s how badly we have undermined our personal relationship with Jesus by our doctrines and beliefs. It has seriously sickened our faith. It has moved the Christian church from a foundation of solid granite rock onto a foundation of shifting sand.

Therefore, when reflecting upon the foundation of our own personal life of faith, we must find the courage to knock and seek and ask whether or not our faith is based on doctrines or upon God’s Word as we have it in the Holy Bible.

The purpose of this book is not to tear down and criticize Christianity. The purpose of this book is to prod believers to take a serious look at the foundations of their eternal life and, if necessary, rebuild them upon the bedrock of the text of God’s Word and the real, living Jesus which are absolutely solid and unshakable.

- NOTES -

other books by Dr. Hentrich...

- *The Humanist God*
- *Dare to See*
- *God Doesn't Want to be God Anymore*
- *Angelic DNA*